

Disclaimer: Its Rowling's playground, I just enjoy it. I own none of the characters, locations, and other such things that make up Harry Potter's universe.

A/N: I know not much else for certain at this point, but there WILL be Ron bashing, probably some Draco bashing, and it will be intelligent!pragmatic!Harry, with no BLOODY clue as to what ship it will be, if there even will BE one. But the basis of this is a plot bunny that has been rampaging through my head for a few days, stemming from DrgnMstr's Sorting Abuse Challenge:

What if the Founders had their own ideas on how to protect students? What if the Sorting Hat was the "spokesperson" for Hogwarts herself? What if all students were scanned by the hat for any problems as they came in and were sorted? This might wake some people up, or cause problems for plans people may or may not have made. Conditions:

- 1.) At Harry's sorting, the Sorting hat notices the abuse Harry had gone through at home. Abuse can be canon (neglect and emotional at the very least) or fanon (varying degrees of physical and/or even sexual). It immediately calls a halt to the sorting, calling for Madam Pomfrey and the head of the DMLE and will not sort anyone else until they arrive.
- 2.) There is no way to get around contacting these people (I leave it up to you to figure out how).
- 3.) Only when Harry is in the hands of Law Enforcement and the Healers will sorting continue.
- 4.) Dumbledore can be blind good guy or Dark Lord or anything in between.
- 5.) Harry must get free of the Dursleys for this, they cannot escape punishment.
- 6.) Ships can be any, but 3-some with Hermione and another person or Multi preferable (helping to show him love). Ships can be very slow to begin with.

7.) Harry should get other help from Hogwarts/Sorting Hat throughout his schooling.

8.) Horcruxes okay, but NO HARRY HORCRUX. Mother's protection will not allow it.

9.) Please, no Deathly Hollows.

10.) No evil!Harry, Grey!Harry or Light!Harry preferable, so long as good sided.

And so, with that said, we shall begin... (8/14/10)

Chapter 1: The Curtain Rises

Being the Events in Parallel of Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, Book I

Harry Potter was sitting in the last compartment in the last car of the Hogwarts Express still trying to piece together just how in the bloody hell his life had gotten so turned on its head. From the very large man telling him he was a wizard on his birthday, to where he was now sitting a month and a day later, he had to admit that maybe his life was finally turning around.

He had been in the care of the Dursley's for just under a decade and had been subject to just about every form of abuse one could commit against a child, save sexual. And at that thought he shivered and felt more than a little nauseous.

He was joined by a red-haired boy, obviously from the family from outside the platform. He introduced himself as Ron Weasley. He said something about everywhere else being filled up, which Harry found hard to believe. But not being one to turn away company due to Dudley's constant bullying, he made no objecting. When he asked to Harry's scar however, Harry made the mental note that this particular fellow probably had the least amount of tact on the train, nor given the way he went on cluelessly, did have an overabundance of intelligence.

The twins from before, Fred and George, checked in on the two of them before heading off to parts unknown.

Harry may never have gotten very good marks at school, but he did so for a very good reason. If he did anything other than cooking, cleaning, and gardening (of which Dudley did none) better than his pig of a cousin he would be beaten and then locked in his cupboard. It actually took more intelligence to pass with deliberately bad marks than it did with perfect ones. Who would of thought?

So Harry had always read ahead, and spent as much possible time in libraries, which actually served a secondary purpose, given the fact that Duddykins avoided them like the plague. So when he had gotten his school books, he had read them all, multiple times.

So when a round-faced boy came in asking if either of them had seen a toad, Harry knew of something that might help, even if neither he nor the boy could actually use it.

In a level tone, Harry asked, "You might want to ask one of the upper years if they could just use a summoning spell on your toad, you know?"

The boy stood there gobsmacked for a moment, before hitting himself in the forehead with the palm of his hand, and stalked off muttering to himself, "So THAT'S how Gran is always finding Trevor..."

A while thereafter, a rather bushy haired girl interrupted Harry's musings, which had long since stopped being interrupted by the Ron's incessant prattling about Quidditch, chess, or sweets, but when he was about to cast some sort of spell on his rat, he started paying attention, if only to know when to duck for cover, only to thankfully be interrupted by the aforementioned girl. She too was asking about a toad.

Harry rather boredly queried, "Toad? Belongs to a boy with a round face, toad possibly goes by the name of Trevor?"

She nodded.

"Sent him off to look for someone in a higher year to beg a summoning spell."

She stood there with her mouth open for a minute as if it wasn't the most obvious solution in the work, and then got side tracked by the fact that Ron appeared about to do some magic, which she absolutely had to see.

Said magic turned out to be a poem. A rather horrid poem at that. The red just went from being of questionable intelligence to removing all doubt. All ties would have to be severed, and all bridges burned, at the earliest opportunity. A gormless buffoon like this would be a danger to himself and others when wielding magic, or god forbid, making potions.

When Harry introduced himself, and she called herself Hermione Granger, she started citing books and chattering on, in such a way that led Harry to a couple of conclusions. Firstly, she absolutely adored books. Adored them in a way in which it seemed she believed they could do no wrong. If her company was ever going to be worthwhile, she would have to be introduced to the series of concepts: humans are innately biased, and are incapable of completely withholding it; that books, no matter how well researched, are written by people; ergo all books have some form of bias in one way or another. Secondly, and as a correlation to her obsession with books, it would probably run a high end probably that she probably had few friends. Thirdly, and as an extension of all the aforementioned, she would probably hold any and all authority figures as unassailable. This could be fixed along with the bias by teaching her that no one is infallible.

One might wonder why an eleven year would think things out in such away. To which Harry would point out that abuse and isolation would most likely tend to make anyone older than their actual, physical age.

After the girl left, Harry went back to his thoughts, until they were again derailed... By none other than the rather insufferable boy that he had met at the robe store. Draco Malfoy. And he had brought muscle with him, in the form of a pair of boys named Crabbe and Goyle. He went on a bit about the right sort and the wrong sort in the wizarding world. Harry had already come to the conclusion that he was a bully, and Harry hated bullies with a rather unholy passion. He would delay this rather... ferret-y character for as long as possible.

He would then avoid him, and then if he could not take a hint, he would have to be destroyed.

So, in the interest of buying as much time as possible, Harry carefully said, "I really will have to think about this Malfoy. This is all so new to me. I think I'll need a couple of days to settle into Hogwarts, maybe a fortnight at most, before I can get back to you..."

With a rather smug look on his ferret face, Draco replied, "Good thinking, Potter. I hope you make the right decision." And with that he turned and left.

This of course sent Ron, who on the thought animals, made Harry think of a weasel, though the really strange thing was that he was the only member of the Weasley family that made him think it, off the deep end. Ranting about dark wizards and how Harry would turn evil if he associated with wrong sort faster than you could say pumpkin.

When they finally got off the train, Harry put as much distance between himself and Ron as he could. Though he probably would never say it to face of either, Ron and Draco seemed to be cut from similar cloth. And Harry would do his damndest to stay the hell away from either of them. Seeing Hagrid and greeting the gentle giant among men, Harry thought of how the word biased seemed to permeate the Wizarding World. Most of the people who he had met and talked to seemed to see things in such a clearly black and white manner that he was starting to wonder if magic somehow managed to polarize the way people seemed to think. His thoughts thus distracted he climbed into a boat with Granger and the toad-boy, who at this point introduced himself as Neville Longbottom, Harry was only really paying half of his attention to the sights.

When Hagrid handed them over to a rather stern looking woman, who introduced herself as the Deputy Headmistress, she then explained they would be sorted into one of the four houses before the opening feast, and that their house would be like their family for the next seven years. Harry prayed that it wouldn't be like his surviving family.

When finally led into the great hall for the sorting it turned out a hat would do it. A sodding hat. These people were crazy... of course then the piece of headwear just HAD to start singing.

(Just go read the song from the book)

Harry just stood there, looking rather gobsmacked at the hat, up until the first name was called. He watched wondering just how the hell some imbued a rather ratty looking hat with intelligence only paying attention as Granger and Longbottom were sorted into Gryffindor and Malfoy was sorted into Slytherin.

As his own name was called and the hat came down over his eyes, he heard a voice saying, 'Ah, hello Mr. Potter... Let's just take a quick peek into your thoughts and memories, so we can get you sorted.'

He felt a slight rustling in his head, and then silence, a rather angry and upset silence that seemed to stem from the hat.

The voice then said, in a manner that brooked no misunderstanding as to how truly upset it was, 'What in the bloody hell happened to your childhood!'

A/N: Any volunteers for Beta would be welcome. Not much else for note other than the fact the Dumbles will NOT be evil, just the father of all bastards. Just never saw him as evil, the other thing, YES. Chapters will now have titles. Hopefully.

Now, on with the show. (8/15/10)

Chapter 2: Occlumency and a Meeting

Rather confused as to why the voice, probably belonging to the piece of rather worn headwear gracing his noggin, would be upset about his "childhood", Harry was at a loss for words when he said/thought, 'Huh?'

With a rather bizarre combination of a sigh and a chuckle, the hat said, 'One of my duties as the Sorting Hat of Hogwarts is to ensure that incoming students are safe from their families. So do you understand where I am more than a little upset about what your so called relations have done to you?'

'Yes... but what can you do about it?'

'More than you think, I just need to dig around a lot more to see the full extent to just how horrible they were... However to handle this part of what I need to do, we are going to have to go deeper into your head.'

'Why?'

'Because, how we are talking now, takes place at the speed of a normal conversation, but by going deeper, whatever will, happen will happen at the speed of thought, and you and I will be able to get more accomplished before we need to get the relevant authorities involved.'

'By the way you say authorities, my Aunt and Uncle are not going to like what will come to pass.' A rather feral grin split Harry's face at this. 'Sure.'

The entire Hall watched with bated breath as Harry Potter, THE Harry Potter, The-Boy-Who-Lived, had the longest sorting so far this Opening Feast.

The castle's Potions Master, Severus Snape, sneered at a Potter once more having to make a scene. While the majority of the faculty who were around, in one way or another, when the boy's parents were students could not help but wonder how much like either of his parents he would be. The majority of the students, spread about all four houses, were hoping that their house would be the one to get him.

The Headmaster kept his perfectly calm face, however he was giving a small mental frown. There was a fact tickling the back of his head. There was something about the Hat he was forgetting. Something important. Something that would interrupt one of his carefully laid plans... But he had so many plans that he couldn't tell what it was.

The world felt like it was being shifted an inch or so to the left. And then Harry was sitting on a bench, in a vast colorless field, with gray mists rolling around. Across from him, sitting on a stool at what would be eye level, was the hat.

Eyes darting back and forth, Harry rather blandly stated, "So this is the inside of my head... It's rather boring."

A dry chuckle from the hat, and it replied, "Well it is to be expected. This is not a part of your mind that is supposed to be populated by anything until you fill it. As opposed to your subconscious, where, in the majority of humanity, dwell rampant bunnies."

"Bunnies?"

"Yes... you look into the number of heads I have, and you start to build opinions like that. Trust me. But I digress, what we are here to do is go over all the memories of your abusive relatives. While we are doing that, I am going to give you grounding in a field of magic called Occlumency, which deals with the ordering of thoughts, and the protection of the mind from outside influences. The first step to learn it requires a witch or wizard to sort through their memories. The founders did not wish any student who had to go through the steps required if they were abused to have to go through their

memories an additional time in order to learn this particular discipline."

"Well that is a rather delightful combination of thoughtfulness and foresight."

"It is also good planning. Now here is how it is going to go..."

"Wait... if we're going to be working here for a while, I need to be able to call you something... I mean, calling you hat..."

The hat gave a hearty chuckle, and said, "Of course, call me Alistair. Now, before I was interrupted..."

Alistair directed Harry to start constructing an environment to store his memories in, and while he was doing that he gave a lecture on how to return to this 'mindspace' without his help. Harry settled on a combination library/study with a combination of shelves, cabinets, and chests to store the memories in.

When that was finished, they started working their way back through Harry's life. The final memory they dealt with, the first of Harry's recollections, was the memory of Halloween 1981. Afterwards, the memory, in the form of a pitch black book sent a bizarre sense of connection through Harry when he handled it. Alistair, who had never encountered or heard of anything like this suggested, and Harry agreed, that caution would behoove them. So Harry built a separate room, with thick walls, plated on the inside walls, ceiling, and floor with steel, and placed a chest inside with four inch thick walls. The door more resembled one from a bank vault than anything else. And even then, they decided to drop a pair of bars in front of it.

Harry collapsed into a chair, stared rather pointedly at Alistair, and asked, "Are we done yet?"

Alistair sighed, and said, "Yes, Harry, we are done. When we go back out, just stay quiet, and follow my lead."

At the twenty-five minute point, people started to worry. None of the staff could remember a sorting lasting this long. Dumbledore was still trying to figure out just what the hell he couldn't remember. McGonagall was starting to get worried about the child of her

godson. The students were getting hungry. Snape was starting to get angry. Flitwick had just remembered a piece of lore about the hat, and had turned as white as a ghost.

Just then the Hat opened its mouth and yelled, "Headmaster, Conference, Meeting Room 7!"

Dumbledore, showing an unwavering calm with twinkling eyes, got out of his seat and walked over to Harry and the Hat, and unruffingly stated, "Now, Dobbin, none of this. We have to continue the sorting."

Harry felt a spike of anger from the Hat and asked, 'He has never talked to you, has he?'

Alistair just seethed in silence for a minute before replying, loud enough for the entire hall, "The Sorting is hereby delayed until later tonight."

The twinkle vacated from Dumbledore's eyes, and he started, "Dobbin..."

But he was interrupted by a very loud, irate, female voice that seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere at once, "ALBUS PERCIVAL WULFRIC BRIAN DUMBLEDORE! CONFERENCE! MEETING ROOM SEVEN!"

All of staff, headmaster included, paled at the thought of the Dumbledore being yelled at by the castle in the middle of the Great Hall. The two left house tables moved toward the left wall, the right toward the other, and a fifth table with enough settings for the rest of the unsorted first years appeared in the middle. Dumbledore just stared, trying to think of what was happening.

"NOW!"

before going completely AU. I dislike HBP, and dispise DH. Made a note that chapter 1 begins the telling of events in rough parallel of SS. That is all.

Let's get it on. (8/16/10)

Chapter 3: Best Laid Plans

As the entire hall just sat there with their collective mouths, Harry asked Alistair, 'So who was it that yelled at Dumbles?'

Chortling at Harry's truncating of the Headmaster's name, the Hat responded, 'That Harry was Hogwarts herself.'

'The castle is...' He ran a dozen or so words through his mind trying to figure out the best way to phrase what he wanted to say, and finally settled on, 'Aware?'

'That is a good term, though anyone save the bigots of the magical world, ALIVE, would be much better, no matter that she is not flesh and blood.'

'Hrm. So how often does the Lady Hogwarts speak?'

The hat sat silently on his head for a few seconds.

'What'd I say?'

'I'll tell you later, let's get the two of us to the meeting room. Now here's how to get there...'

As Harry stood up and started walking out of the Hall, food started appearing at all of the tables, and as he reached the doors to the entrance hall, Alistair yelled one more time, "Deputy Headmistress, your presence will be required also."

Silence ruled the great hall as The-Boy-Who-Lived and The Sorting Hat left. Some stared at the doors, others at the new table, still more fixed their gazes upon the Headmaster, who was standing near the stool, his mouth working like a fish out of water. This scene held for a full two minutes before conversation broke out in a sea of whispers.

Albus was not having a good night. Dobbin, as he liked to call the hat, had not only ignored his promptings of a swift and immediate sorting of Harry into either Hufflepuff or Gryffindor, he had called a conference of all things. And finally bits of facts and lore, reports ignored for the Greater Good, and suspicions quashed, started linking together. And if it was what he thought it was, things were going to start going wrong for his plan to finally stop the Dark Lord.

Albus spoke, loud enough to only carry to the head table, "Severus, come with me. Minerva, I know the hat said your presence would be required but..."

McGonagall interrupted him, "Albus, you've already received a public dressing down from the castle once tonight, which need I mention has never happened before, do you want to go through another?"

He just shook his head at this, and left hall with Snape and McGonagall in his wake. His thoughts churned on how to wrench events back into his control, and how to keep Harry under his thumb. If one boy's happiness, life, and soul had to be sacrificed for the Greater Good of the Wizarding World, it would be. And no one would stop Albus Dumbledore from seeing it through.

As Harry and Alistair stepped into the conference room, the adolescent took stock of what was in it. Unadorned stone walls, a lit fireplace with a flowerpot on the mantle, and a longish table that had seating for fourteen, with some sort of stone basin sitting in the middle.

Alistair twitched on Harry's head and spoke out loud, "Harry would you please place me on top of the bowl on the table. "

A little confused at this request, he did as Alistair asked, but curiously said, "Why though, Al?"

Alistair chuckled at the abbreviation of his name and said, "Because Harry, this bowl is a Pensieve, a magical device that allows others to view and experience the memories of another person without requiring the use of Mind Arts."

As the two spoke, the chair at the end of the table shifted and reformed into a plinth, high enough that anything set on it would be at eye level to most adults sitting at the table in the room.

Alistair, now finished putting a collection of Harry's memories in the pensieve, had Harry move him to the column, and take the seat next to him. A few minutes later they were joined by the three staff members.

Dumbledore, eyes twinkling, and his voice set in his most grandfatherly tone, began, "Dobbin, I must say..."

But that was as far as he got, before Harry interrupted, "The Hat's name is Alistair, which you would know if you ever thought to ask him, Headmaster."

And that set off the pale and furious Snape, who snidely spit out, "Now you listen here, you insolent whelp..."

Now it was Alistair's turn to interrupt, "I don't know why you are here Snape, you were not asked to this conference. Leave. Now."

Snape whirled on the Headmaster, whispered, "Are you going to let a tattered relic and a child get away..."

For the second time that night, Lady Hogwarts herself spoke. She was not as loud, nor as angry this time. She was however very stern sounding. "Remove thyself Severus, before I must do it for you." And it sent the Potions Master scampering.

McGonagall watched all this impassively, wondering what in the blazes was going on.

Alistair muttered something vaguely sounding like 'finally', began the conference, "Before we move on, I'd like you to bring in the head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, and have him or her bring along a Healer specializing in adolescents from St. Mungo's."

Albus's left eye twitched ever so slightly, "I'm sure we don't have to bother Madam Bones with this, I know a few Aurors who could deal with this, and I am sure whatever we need a healer for Madam Pomfrey can handle it..."

"No, Albus. We are starting this at the top, and we are going to use a neutral Healer. Deputy Headmistress, if you would be so kind, the fireplace is connected to the Network, and there is already Powder." Harry looked questioningly at Alistair, who continued, "Well Harry, Wizards have a way of communicating and traveling via fireplaces called the Floo Network," Harry grunted at the name, "Well no one has ever accused us at giving things brilliant names, but continuing, the Floo Network is activated and used at fireplaces by something called Floo Powder, and yes, no need to comment about the extremely descriptive name."

They lapsed into silence until rejoined a few minutes later by Professor McGonagall, a gray haired witch with a monocle, and a brown haired witch who had a red cross in a white circle on the arm of her green robes.

Alistair cleared his non-existent throat, "First, I would like to thank you, Madam Bones, and you Healer..."

The woman spoke up, "Andromeda Tonks."

"Now, to begin with I would like everyone, save Harry and myself, to view the memories I placed into the pensieve on the table. There are only half a dozen in it, and it shouldn't take too long."

As the four adults seemed to stare off into space after having placed a finger in the bowl, Harry asked, "Why did you seem so surprised that I called the castle 'Lady Hogwarts'?"

But it was not Alistair who answered, "Because, dear Harry, I have not been referred to as such by any save Alistair, since the last of the founders passed from this world."

"I somehow get the feeling that you are not normally this talkative m'lady."

"No, but you shall find out why in a short while Harry."

With that, Harry settled down into silence, waiting for the next shoe to drop.

Ten minutes later, the four stumbled back, horror painted across all their faces, Healer Tonks appearing as white as a bed sheet,

McGonagall and Madam Bones shaking with barely suppressed rage, and a note of confusion in the Headmaster's eyes, stemming from one thought, 'How could anyone treat their own blood like that?'

Alistair brought everyone's attention back to the meeting, "Horrible, I know. And that is why we are all here. Those memories are the worst of the worst, but there are still a great many I can bring to light. Before this meeting adjourns, I am going to fill that pensieve with memories so that you, Madam Bones, can begin to prosecute Mr. Potter's so called relatives."

Both Madam Bones and Healer Tonks managed to splutter out some that vaguely sounded like 'as in Harry Potter?' Neither had known who the child they were watching be abused was, since the only times he was referred to he was called either boy or freak. Both looked at the hero of the Wizarding World, and wondered anew how anyone could do that to a child.

Madam Amelia Bones had always been curious as to what had happened to Harry. She had worked together with his father James. She had been a Senior Auror while he had been a Hit Wizard during the war against He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. She had been fond of both James and Lily, never mind the fact that they had both survived multiple encounters with the Dark Lord.

Andromeda Tonks was wondering what moron had placed Lily's son with Petunia Dursley. She did not know Lily as well as her traitor of a cousin had, but she did know that Petunia absolutely despised her sister, and that placing her son with that 'family' could only lead to pain.

Minerva McGonagall had spun on the Headmaster and started tearing him a new one. From what those watching could piece together, he had been responsible for Harry's placement with those three.

Finally Alistair needed to move things along and yelled, "If I could have everyone's attention please. Thank you. As much as I would like to see Albus included in whatever criminal proceedings are going to follow, all of us present, save Harry, know that the chances of anything actually sticking fare the same chances of a snowball in Hades. The Castle and I shall handle Albus's abuse of power, and we assure you it will NOT be a slap on the wrist. And I will dole out

those punishments before the end of this meeting. However I would like to discuss with Madam Bones how things should proceed from here concerning the custody of Mr. Potter, while Healer Tonks gives him a cursory examination."

Madam Bones picked up Alistair and retreated to one corner of the room, McGonagall grabbed Dumbledore by the ear and dragged to the other corner on same side of the room, and Healer Tonks lead Harry to the other side of the room and started casting diagnostic charms. After about fifteen minutes she was muttering to herself in a rather confused tone of voice. As the three groups reconvened, Albus was looking chastised, McGonagall still looked angry, Madam Bones had a rather feral smile gracing her face, Healer Tonks looked confused, Harry hungry, and Alistair like a hat.

"So before we move on to what we will be doing about what has been shown," Alistair began, "Healer Tonks, would you please appraise us to how Harry is doing, physically?"

"Yes, apart from what appears to be a minor case of malnutrition..."

"Wait... minor? They practically starved Mr. Potter."

"The only way I can explain it is that his magic possibly compensated for the fact, which in its self if only more confusing. I can say he has a number of bruises and contusions, two hairline fractures, and a few other maladies, including a few slight misalignments in set bones. All of which can be fixed quite easily, what I am worried about is his mind..."

"Yes I know. As near as I can put it... those... people," no one in the room could mistake the scorn in the Hat's voice in reference to the Dursleys, "beat the childhood out of Harry. In my own opinion, and with the consultation of Hogwarts, we agree that mentally and emotionally Harry is somewhere in the range of a decade older than he is physically. The other times I have had to take action like this, I usually had to make liberal use of calming charms that were built into my magic for just such occasions. In fact I usually spend the meeting from atop the abused's head. I can say that the Hogwarts and I shall be working with Harry to see that he at least gets some fun out of his education, but apart from that... I'd shrug if I could. But now, if that is everything..."

No one made any move to add anything, so the Hat continued.

"Very well.

"I, ALISTAIR, THE SORTING HAT OF HOGWARTS, AND VOICE OF THE FOUNDERS FOUR, HEREBY DO DECLARE THE FOLLOWING:

"Headmaster ALBUS PERCIVAL WULFRIC BRIAN DUMBLEDORE shall hereby be subject to the following:

"Firstly, he shall swear an oath on his magic and his life to have as little interference in the life of Harry James Potter as is necessary and as is required by the stations that he holds, until Mr. Potter specifically asks otherwise, if ever;

"Secondly, that he shall be confined to his quarters and office for the first term of this school year, unless otherwise required by any office he holds;

"Thirdly, his guardianship of Mr. Potter, both Magical and Financial, are to be given up, and he shall never seek to regain either, nor shall he ever seek Legal or Physical guardianship, outside of what is required as Headmaster, and even then the bulk of in loco parentis rights shall instead fall to his head of house, whichever house that shall be;

"Fourthly, he is to unseal the wills of James and Lily Potter at the next session of the Wizengamot;

"In the event that any of these are not met, Headmaster ALBUS PERCIVAL WULFRIC BRIAN DUMBLEDORE, shall be transported to the castle by the means that are available to her to recall the Head from anywhere upon earth. His magic is to be stripped in its entirety, he will be removed with disgrace from his position as Headmaster, and he shall be banished from the Castle and Grounds of Hogwarts for all of time.

"In furtherance of the current Headmaster's inability to gain worthy teachers for a number of subjects taught at the school, the following will happen:

"Head of House Slytherin, Potions Master, Professor SEVERUS SNIDGET SNAPE, shall be stripped of his Head of House status, placed upon probation, and shall swear oaths to the following effects;

"He shall treat all students, regardless of any bias or bigotry, equally;

"He shall also actually teach in his class, not simply put directions, which are often deliberately erroneous, on the board and direct the students to make the potion.

"If his teaching does not improve by the end of this school year, he is to be sacked forthwith.

"Professor CUTHBERT GALILEO BINNS, is hereby sacked.

"Professor SYBILL PATRICIA TRELAWNEY, is hereby sacked, and the subject of divination shall no longer be taught at Hogwarts, for the simple reason that one is either a seer or one is not.

"The following is hereby sealed by the magic of Hogwarts until it can come to pass.

"Professor QUIRINIUS QUIEVER QUIRRELL, is to be exorcised of the malignant spirit of TOM MARVOLO RIDDLE, who is otherwise known as the DARK LORD VOLDEMORT, and the aforementioned spirit shall be ejected from the castle and grounds. It is unlikely QUIRINIUS QUIEVER QUIRRELL will survive the exorcism.

"All new staffing is to be undertaken by the Deputy Headmistress for a period of one decade. All staffing changes must be approved by the portraits of the four founders, to which I will direct the Deputy and swear the Deputy to secrecy to the location of the portraits.

"As to the disposition of one Harry James Potter, all forms of guardianship shall pass to myself and the Castle of Hogwarts until such at time as suitable replacements can be found. In addition, he shall be made a Ward of Hogwarts, which I shall explain to him upon a later date.

"SO I HAVE SPOKE. SO IT WILL BE WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF HOGWARTS. SO MOTE IT BE!"

As the Hat had been going on with its declarations, Dumbledore felt like he was being dealt hammerblow after hammerblow. He could almost so many carefully and elegantly laid plans being turned to ash, and he could do NOTHING about it. By the end of Dob... Alistair's decrees Albus was actually feeling quite ill. And when he spoke the words of ritual pronouncement, he could do nothing as what was left of the color in his face left, as so many carefully laid plans blew away into the wind.

A/N: Here's to two in one day. Again thanks to any reviewers. Chapters will always be whatever length I feel a scene needs, so expect a large variance in length. Oh, and never expect to actually write out accents, I hate reading them, and doubly hate writing them.

Next chapter, roll out! (8/16/10)

Chapter 4: The Sorting Ends, Finally

After a few moments of silence, Madam Bones was the first to speak, "Well I may not agree with Albus not being prosecuted for his actions, I am aware in the difficulty in bringing any criminal charges against someone of his station, political power, and history. So I must be content with what the Alistair has made the Headmaster subject to. Though goodness knows I want to see him in Azkaban. Well the least I can do is stuff his relatives there." She got up and headed toward the fireplace.

Healer Tonks stood, and spoke next, "I will forward my recommendations to Madam Pomfrey in the morning. Mr. Potter should head to the Hospital Wing before breakfast tomorrow. He should also get a full physical as soon as possible, Alistair would you please convey that to whomever you turn custody of him over to?"

Alistair assented, and then she too left. The Hat then had Harry put him back on his head. Alistair then spoke up, "Let's finish up with the sorting."

Dumbledore then apparently made one last bid for control, "Of course, we need to finish up the..."

"Don't you remember that you are grounded, Albus? Just go to your room. Oh, and by the way, Nicolas and Perenelle have been informed that you are using their property as bait. I believe that they will be making their way to the castle in a day or two. Deputy Headmistress if you will lead the way please. Oh, and Albus, the door to the third floor corridor on the left side is sealed save for either Nicolas or Perenelle. Good night, Headmaster."

On the way back into the Great Hall, Harry and Alistair started talking about the original purpose that this entire thing started with.

'So where are we going to put you Harry? You most definitely have the intelligence and wisdom needed for Ravenclaw... however I believe if I were to stuff you in a tower full of know-it-all bookworms who trust print more than a wolf starting them in the eyes, either you or the rest of the house would be driven insane in under 72 hours...'

'Or less. I have the feeling that trying to explain bias to anyone in the Wizarding World could drive me to murder.'

'You have both the cunning and ambition for Sly...'

'There will be murder in the castle if I have to room with Malfoy. Next.'

'Hufflepuff house is home to those who value loyalty and hard work. Though you have never met any to whom you would give your loyalty...'

'Save you, and you have it.'

'Yes... but something I can tell is that for those you are loyal to...'

'I'll storm the gates of Hell itself for them.'

'And of course given the torture those people put you through; you know the value of hard work.'

'It's a possibility, but what about the last house.'

'You most definitely have the courage to belong to the house of lions. You lived through what others would let destroy themselves. And I think that if you spend any time in the House of Gryffindor your own sense of honor will come to the surface.'

'So basically I have my pick... with my own preferences leaning toward either the badgers or lions...'

At this point, they made their way back into hall and Harry sat down on the stool. Everyone had finished eating, and McGonagall stood at the front of the hall and spoke rather sternly, "Now that we have dealt with that, we will continue the sorting."

'I'll pick the house of the brave.'

"GRYFFINDOR!" 'We'll speak later, Harry, I still have some things I need to explain to you.'

The Twins he met on the train started yelling, "We got Potter!" And the rest of House broke into rather confused sounding applause. Going over to the table and grabbing a seat next one of the twins, he pulled some food to him and started eating, watching the sorting.

He wasn't really interested in who went where up until the Weasel got put under the hat. After a two minute long sorting, the hat yelled out, as Harry chanted 'Not Gryffindor', "SLYTHERIN!" To which the Twins were absolutely speechless. The sorting ended soon after, and McGonagall made a few short announcements before dismissing everyone to their respective houses, before moving over toward Harry, telling him a house-elf (whatever the hell that is) will bring Alistair to him in the morning so the Hat can talk to him.

Following the rest of his year/house mates, they made their way to Gryffindor Tower, the entrance a portrait of a rather large lady (whom the prefect rather rudely introduced as the Fat Lady) and the password as Caput Draconis. Led up into the common room, and then pointed toward the dorms. His fellow first year male Gryffindors were Neville Longbottom, Dean Thomas, and Seamus Finnigan.

Neville, the only one who had talked to Harry before the Sorting, stuttered out the question, "S-so wh-why'd the Hat stop the sorting?"

Harry, smiling sadly, said, "There's no need to be afraid to ask me a question Neville, but as to that... ask me in a couple months or so when I know you better. If there isn't anything else, sleep tight, Neville."

"Good night, Harry."

A/N2: Yes Ron's with the snakes, Harry is going to ask Alistair next chapter, will he answer? Who knows, not even I at this point. As always making up as I go along!

A/N: Continuing thanks to my reviewers. Hopefully third in a day! If I get to classes this chapter, no one nitpick about how my order isn't canon. It's too much of a pain to wrap ones head around the order sometimes, so I'll make up my own. The 'explanation' is the Hat threw a monkey wrench into things.

Here's how class schedules are going to work in my fic:

Curfew ends at 6am.

Breakfast starts at 7am runs til 9am.

Four fifty minute class blocks from 9am to 1pm.

(Classes start and end at five minutes after the hour and five before respectively)

Lunch from 12:30pm to 2:30pm.

Four more fifty minute class blocks from 2pm to 6pm.

Dinner runs from 5:30pm to 7:30pm.

Curfew starts at 10pm.

Lights out at midnight. (It is rarely enforced.)

Now, the curtain rises on the second day in Hogwarts. (8/16/10)

Chapter 5: A The First Lesson Isn't a Class

Harry woke up when he normally did. Early. Too early. So as normal, he went back to sleep for an hour or so. Hey, no one's perfect.

He finally hauled himself out of bed shortly after six. He pulled a uniform out of his trunk, and got ready to face the day. When he got back from getting clean, Alistair was sitting on his trunk. Quietly gathering up the Hat, he made his way down to the Common Room... which was empty.

Setting Al on his head, and dropping himself onto a chair in front of the fireplace, Harry said, "Good morning Al, two questions. One, why'd you use my abuse as an excuse to sack two teachers and put a third on probation, and two, any particular reason you put Ron the Weasel in with the snakes?"

Al chuckled, replying, "Well to the first, Hogwarts has been looking for an excuse to get rid of those two, and to put Snape on warning. Getting rid of Binns means that Dumbledore can no longer pocket the ghost's wages. Sacking Trelawney gets rid of Dumbles pet seeress... even though she has never had another prophesy after her supposed first. As for Snape, trust me, if he hadn't been dealt with how he did, he would make every petty attempt to make your life miserable. He hated your father when they went to school here, and he is a vindictive man. These actions had to either aid you in some way or force a penance on Dumbledore, or I would not have been able to do it. You gave us a vector to effect a change, but it does help you. Why didn't you ask about the fourth professor affected?"

"I think I understand your reasoning... As to the last professor... well... I don't want to be within a hundred miles of Voldemort in any way shape or form... By the way, did the exorcism kill Quirrell?"

"Yes. And since he let the Dark Tosser possess him willingly, he deserves it. I sent an owl to Madam Bones as soon as he hit the ground, she'll probably be here with a team of Aurors to investigate. Anyway, I digress. As to your second question, when that mental deficient put me on his head all he was thinking of was how to become your 'best mate' and how he could benefit from it. All the ideas were half baked, showing a complete lack of qualities belonging to Ravenclaw. The use of you shows a lack of the loyalty indicative of Hufflepuff. And Gryffindor would be bad for his health. Besides, Lady Hogwarts wanted to see what would happen when you make a Weasel and a Ferret share a dorm. So do you want to know the details involving being a Ward of Hogwarts?"

"Sure, just one more question first. Why did it sound like when you were making your little pronouncement last night, that whenever you spoke someone's name except mine, it would read in a transcript as if it were all in capitals?"

"You noticed that? Strange, next to no one ever notices when a NAME is invoked. What I did last night was use each person's name and a bit of the massive power of Hogwarts to bind my pronouncements to them. For instance last night Snape had to make those two oaths in the spirit in which they were meant, not the letter, or else he would be forced to leave Hogwarts. And both Binns and Trelawney need to be out of the school by the end of term. That is when any sacking takes full effect."

"Okay, so Ward of Hogwarts? What is with that?"

"Basically, it means that I get to be a counselor for you for the next seven years. I go around the castle with you, and if you wish I can go with you when you leave for the summer. One of the reasons I did this was to get myself into the castle proper. I managed to diffuse a situation where the dragon dung would have hit the fire by year's end under the guise of your conference. I have the feeling you are going to be a trouble magnet, no offense."

"None taken. My second Halloween saw the death of my parents, and the worst decade anyone in human history ever suffered followed it. A man who you say hates me because of who my father was teaches here, and the monster that caused the events of All Hallows Eve 1981 was possessing another professor. So you want to be around me to help defuse whatever emergency may come up next year?"

"One of the reasons. The other chief reason is see to it that you have some fun while you're here at Hogwarts. Just because your life has been hell, and you seem to attract trouble they way snow does the color white, doesn't mean you need to stop living your life. In fact, deep down I saw something that your father had. I would suggest getting to know the Weasley Twins and learning the fine art of pranking."

The evil grin that lit Harry's face would have sent even the most self-respecting member of the House of Lions scurrying to hide under their four poster. "You know as well as I do that the chief reason my cousin continued to wet the bed well after his tenth birthday was that I kept sticking his meaty ham-hands into bowls of water. Now, not to say that you don't look distinguished but..."

"You don't want to wear what is either an obviously ancient hat, or what is obviously The Sorting Hat. Yes. In fact I was just getting around to the fact that I can look any piece of headwear I wish, and no matter the time of year, I will keep your head warm when it is cold, and cool when it is hot. Any preference?"

"Yeah, can you do a watch cap? Color doesn't matter... so long as you don't randomly change during the day."

"Yes, a watch cap is quite simple, and in fact quite boring. I hope you ask for a fedora at one point, and as for color how about we show some house pride for the first week." And with that Al to the shape of a simple cap with alternating vertical stripes of red and gold. Harry pulled him off his head to have a look and then slipped the Hat back on.

'So Al, when does breakfast start?'

'Not for a while yet. How about we work on your Occlumency, start building actual defenses, while we wait?'

'Sure, just how much Occlumency can you teach me?'

'As much as you are willing to learn, insomuch as it could either be classified as a White to Dark Gray Art.'

'Huh?'

'Make your way to your mindscape and I'll explain.'

Harry shrugged, and closed his eyes, focusing and clearing his thoughts to appear in the middle of his mind. Alistair was already set on his stool, and Harry appeared sitting in the chair opposite the Hat.

"As you asked, more or less, the 'color' of the magical arts. This methodology of categorizing magic is no longer used, because those who have been in power, and those succeeding them for the past few centuries, have perpetuated a definitive classification of magic as either being Light or Dark. However almost all magic is subject to abuse. The older system that I am going to introduce you to, and teach you in entirety if you wish, is based upon the intent required for the basic casting of the spell. Using this system, instead of a verity of Light and Dark spells, what you get is a vast majority of

Gray. The spells that could be called either pure White or pure Black can be counted on one hand. Light Gray are those spells whose intent is usually based in non-lethal combat or healing. Dark Gray tends to consist of lethal combat or attempts to just cause harm. Grey is where the magic has no intent, only how you use it."

"There doesn't seem to be any need to teach this beyond that explanation."

"Well, most don't seem to understand it. I can tell you get most of it, and will probably learn the rest on your own."

"Now to building defenses. We'll start with those that could be considered White. Walls. The composition, thickness, and any reinforcements would protect against blunt attacks. Your walls are already a foot thick, now there is a stone that exists in the magical world, it's extremely rare, but nigh unbreakable. It's called obdurite, an even unchanging gray in color, with the same reflectivity of concrete. Try fixing it in your mind and altering your walls..."

They worked on this application of the defensive Mind Art for what seemed like four hours before Alistair was pleased with the composition of the walls, and he had Harry add a curtain wall before he said they were finished for the day. Coming back to the common room, some of the other older students had filtered into the common room.

Checking his watch, Harry hauled himself off the couch, 'Hospital wing before breakfast, right?'

'Yes, Harry, Healer Tonks has probably already gotten in contact with Poppy, and you do NOT want that woman angry at you.'

'Can you point the quickest way there?'

'Of course...'

A/N2: Full schedule for classes is:

Mon

9am-10am Double Charms w/ Ravenclaw

11am Free

12pm Transfiguration

2pm Free

3pm Herbology

4pm Defense Against Dark Arts

5pm Free

Tue

9am Free

10am-11am Double Potions w/ Slytherin

12pm Defense Against Dark Arts

2pm Transfiguration

3pm Free

4pm History

5pm Free

Wed

9am Free

10am Charms

11am-12pm Double Herbology w/ Hufflepuff

2pm Free

3pm-4pm Double History w/ Ravenclaw

5pm Free

12am-2am Astronomy

Thur

9am Free

10am-11am Double Potions w/ Slytherin

12pm Defense Against Dark Arts

2pm Transfiguration

3pm Free

4pm History

5pm Free

Fri

9am-10am Double Charms w/ Ravenclaw

11am Free

12pm Transfiguration

2pm Free

3pm Herbology

4pm Defense Against Dark Arts

5pm Free

Note that all classes have 4 hours a week, with 5 hours of class a day. It looks logical... I pulled it out of my backside. I planned the first and lucked into the second. All while playing it by ear. Yay me! I think I'll stick with it for second year, and keep the 4 hours of class a week for when electives come up in third year. Look at me, I are

planning! (Insert evil, maniacal laughter here.) And yes I am making fun of myself at points.

A/N: Once more, I'd like to thank the reviewers. Probably going to rarely go into details about what is taught in class, unless I have some idea from canon, or the plot bunny goes down the rabbit hole.

And now it is time for the plot monkey to dance. Dance, monkey, dance! (8/17/10)

Chapter 6: To Connect With The World

Harry came out of the hospital wing grumbling mentally to Alistair, 'So I have to drink half a dozen nasty tasting potions before breakfast, everyday, for two months? I almost think I would prefer the malnutrition.'

With a mental sigh, Alistair countered, 'Stop whining like a little girl. One, it is nowhere near as bad as it could have been. Two, after a quick check of her own Madam Pomfrey add a potion that would help deal with all those scars you have. Three, just deal with it. If you don't Poppy is going to hunt you down and force feed you those potions. So just suck it up.'

As Al directed him down to the Great Hall, Harry couldn't help but wonder what classes would be like. Actually, he wondered what classes where he could well and truly apply himself would be like. Even if last night's changes had not come to pass, the Dursleys would not care, and would actually be quite angry, with how he did at this school. It would have been better just not telling them, and therefore he could do as well or as poorly as he wished. He was actually excited to get to class.

'Settle down, Harry. Maybe I should have put you in Ravenclaw. They are among the few in the castle that get so excited about classes on a regular basis.'

'Yes, but this isn't a regular basis. I'll be able to do the best I can with having to worry about my Uncle having a go at me with his belt. And I'll also be learning magic.' And as he thought that an evil grin lit his face up like a Christmas tree.

'And the universe is now quaking in its proverbial boots. Just make sure you don't do anything to break reality, Harry.'

Entering the Great Hall, Harry took a seat at the Gryffindor table and started eating. For some reason instead of putting him off of food, the potions seemed to have made him more hungry. He sent an inquiring thought toward Alistair.

'Well, part of it is due to the fact that the potions are causing you to consume more energy than you normally would. The energy needed to restore your body can't come from the potions alone, most of it has to come from you. Therefore you do need to eat more than you normally would. In addition one of the potions was meant to specifically increase your appetite to where it would be for a young wizard your age. As a group, developing magic users need to eat significantly more than mundane adolescents and teens. By actually getting you to the point where you are eating as much as you really need to sustain your body, you will no longer be wasting a good portion of your magic doing it.'

'Wait. That is something I didn't understand and never asked last night. Healer Tonks mentioned something about my magic possibly... compensating... for my starvation...'

'I've been thinking about that too. It's a little known and little believed bit of information, but some circles of magical thought have put forth the idea that if a moderately powerful wizard or witch were in danger of starvation, a part of their magical power could devote itself to converting what food did make its way into the system into something more potent. Generally magic users that powerful would never be caught in a situation where they would starve, and even fewer would willingly subject themselves to it. As to why you are nowhere near as permanently physically damaged as your memories would indicate you should be, well if you take the fact that your magic was apparently been seeing to it that what little food you got was feeding you as best it could, well why couldn't it heal you as well?'

'That doesn't seem to be too farfetched ...'

That started a conversation about the known physiological differences between magical and non-magical people around Harry's age, and it lasted until shortly before McGonagall, as the Gryffindor head of house, started passing out schedules.

'Okay Al, what don't you know...? You seem to be a master of what you call Mind Arts, what seems like fundamental magical theory, and physiology.'

'You have to remember, I normally spend most of my time sitting on a shelf in the Headmaster's office. Part of the magic that gives me an existence ties me into Hogwarts in a number of ways. One of ways is that I can read any book that is cataloged as belonging to the school, which is quite frankly much, much more than is in the library itself. So at least on the theory side of the equation, I know more about magic than almost any other entity on the planet. However lacking the needed practical knowledge to safely use it, I only study theory as a means to kill time, though it does make me a useful sounding board for Headmasters who actually appreciate having an ancient, genius level intelligent relic around. As to the Mind Arts, it is partly due to my purpose of sorting students, partly because I am a relic that is comprised almost solely of Mind Magics.'

Harry grunted at this, and accepted his schedule from McGonagall, thanking her. He looked to the side and saw that Neville had taken a seat to one side of him while he had been busy eating and having a conversation with Alistair. Taking full stock of the situation, it seemed the entirety of the House had made its way down to breakfast. Granger was sitting on his other side, and for some reason the Twins were sitting across from him.

"Morning Neville, Fred, George, Granger. Looks like us ickle firsties have Double Charms with the Ravenclaws first."

This set Granger off babbling about what the various she read said about the subject. It reinforced the basic conclusions he had come to about her on the train, and add the fact that she apparently did not understand that not everyone had the taste for raw textbook knowledge that she did.

'Alistair, if I don't do something about these rather unsavory habits of hers, she is going to end up alienating the entire house. If I may ask before I start, why isn't she in Ravenclaw?'

'All intellect, no wisdom. The house would chewed her to bits, even though most of them are only slightly better than her.'

And she was just taking a breath, so Harry decided to start in on her, "Okay, you and I need to go through an intellectual exercise." Her eyes lit up at this thought. "This isn't going to be as fun as you think it is going to be. In fact it is probably going to hurt when I drive the needed points home." She looked confused, like she couldn't understand how anything having to do with knowledge and intelligence could harm her. She probably didn't. "All I ask is that for the most part you answer my questions with, yes or no, true or false answers." She nodded, still looking confused. The Twins were watching with interest, and Neville looked like he was wondering what Harry was doing.

"Lesson the first: Books are written by people." She nodded. "Everyone is only human." She nodded again. "To err is human." Again, nodded. "Every person has their own view point." "Yes." "And a person cannot help but put their own viewpoint in anything they create, making a work biased." "True." From the look on her face, you could tell that she was wondering when he was going to get to the point. "Therefore, all books, whether or not it is intentionally done, carry the bias of the author, and the written word of one person cannot be treated as gospel truth. Q.E.D."

A look of hurt entered her eyes as Harry brought a hammerblow down on one of the truths of her world, "Why... why..."

"Why did I have to do that? I have one more thing I'd like to explain to you, and I can guarantee that it will not hurt anywhere near as much as the first."

She looked a little wary at this statement, but she nodded her agreement. She had never really had anyone her age take an interest enough in her to try and teach her something.

"Okay, take a previous statement you agreed to. Every person has their own view point. As a correlation, every person has their own tastes and preferences." She gave him a look that said that statement was obvious. "Everyone has varying levels of intelligence." She made a motion that said 'get on with it'. "Textbooks can be rather dry reading." "Granted." "All of that put together means that not everyone shares your propensity for the discussion of the raw information that comes from textbooks." She nodded glumly.

"Now, as to why I did it. If you continued acting the way you did, you may have very well started alienating the entire house. They would not have wanted to spend any time around you. You would have been shunned, and from what I can tell of your behavior, that probably would have resulted in you spending the next seven years alone, probably making an attempt to read the entirety of the Hogwarts Library, which though to you may seem like a decent pursuit, it is most definitely not healthy, mentally or emotionally."

She could not help but agree with him, also could not help but wonder two things, and the fact that she wanted to ask a question or two was plain on her face, so Harry prodded, "Ask. I may not answer if I deem it too personal, but I won't be mean about it."

"Why? Why take the time and effort to try and explain this to me?"

"I have a soft spot for outcasts, being one myself. "

"Why is it you seem so... well for lack of a better word, mature?"

"Let's see if we become anything even remotely resembling friends, and then maybe I'll tell you."

"Okay... I... I'm gonna go see if I can find the charms classroom." She got up from the table, and headed off.

Neville took this chance to strike up a conversation of his own, "That must not have been easy to do, and you looked ready to be ill when you dropped the end of the first one on her..."

"I don't like hurting people. It's that simple, but it had to be done. It would have been worse for her in the long one, and that is too close to me hurting her by inaction."

"So you have some sort of hero complex?"

Harry stayed silent for a moment pondering that for a moment. "Possibly, I just don't like seeing people hurt."

"I'm gonna head off to the Tower get my books for Charms and Transfiguration. One outcast to another, you mind getting lost on the way to class with me, Harry?"

"Sure thing, Neville. I'll head on up to the tower in a few minutes, I just want to eat a little more."

Following Neville's exit from the table, Harry turned to the Twins, who were still watching in interest. He motioned for them to go on ahead with whatever they were going to do.

"So, Harry..."

"... Forge and I..."

"... Were wondering if you..."

"... As a person of obvious intelligence..."

"... Don't forget cunning, my dear twin..."

"... Yes, yes Gred..."

"... But we digress..."

"... We were wondering whether..."

"... Or not you would wish to join us..."

"... On a number of noble and exciting ventures..."

Harry held up a hand to stop them, but he was grinning evilly. He looked around and no one was watching them, so he asked Alistair if he would mind showing himself to the twins.

'Why, Harry?'

'Because you obviously pointed me towards them with the intention of joining in the pranking sooner or later. So let's just have you in on it from the outset.'

'I can't use any of my access to the castle to cause mayhem.'

'But you and I both know you can still plan mayhem.'

'Caught me.'

The twins' jaws dropped as the cap on Harry's head shifted to the Sorting Hat.

"Alistair here has already pointed me in your direction with the indication I should have some fun in the manner of your normal choosing."

The pair were speechless. Harry had a feeling that he was witnessing something that very rarely happened.

Alistair took this chance to add in his own two cents before turning back into the red and gold cap, "And I doubt you could find much better help than the Son of Prongs."

With the dropping of what was apparently was a rather large bombshell, the left twin fainted and fell backwards off the bench, and the right twin fell forwards into his food.

With a wicked grin plastered on his face he got up and bowed to each of the twins.

'Al, you are absolutely diabolical. You knew they would react like that.'

'Yes. But you had already made them speechless, I wanted to cause some havoc to them.'

Harry made his way back from the Great Hall to the Tower with only minimal prompting, and going up to his trunk to get the things for class, he saw he had at least beat Neville back to the dorm, so he decided to wait. About five minutes later Neville came in, and stared at Harry confusedly, and managed to sputter out a, "How?"

"As a side result of the whole situation last night, I have a very reliable source of directions."

Neville just stared blankly at Harry.

"I'll explain it sooner or later. Grab your stuff. Let's see if we can beat Hermione to Charms."

Neville just shook his head at that.

Chatting idly with Neville about the landmarks on the most reliable path from the Tower to the Charms classroom, Alistair piped in, 'Four people have just crossed the wards, McGonagall seems to be on her way to meet them. It probably is the contingent from the DMLE to fetch Quirrell's corpse. They'll be surprised when they see the back of Quirrellmort's head...'

'Why?'

'Because, he had Voldemort's face sticking out of it.'

The conversation between he and Neville subsided and they also entered the classroom. They were the first save a pair of the more rabid 'Claws. Neville looked at Harry, who shrugged, and was then motioned to pick a place, and they ended up just forward of the middle, pulling out what they would need. They spent some time talking, wondering what Flitwick would be like as a teacher.

Hermione came into class about fifteen minutes before class started, and stood at the door staring at them for a minute with a blank look on her face, before she took a seat in front of the pair of Gryffindor boys, and with a huff she asked, "How do you two know your way around already? Get some help?"

Neville shook his head and pointed at Harry, "Hey, I did nothing. I just followed him."

Harry grinned wickedly, and replied, "And what I told him, was that it was a trade secret. I might tell someone... eventually. But not now."

The three then fell into a discussion of what they might cover in class the first day, and Hermione seemed to be at least trying to avoid sounding like a know-it-all. Then class started, with Flitwick taking the roll from atop a perch of books so could see over his desk. When he got to 'Potter, Harry', he fell off in his excitement.

Following the class, which all three enjoyed, Hermione asked if Harry knew where the library was. Neville shrugged, said they had about an hour to kill anyway, and so Harry led the way on the most direct route to the library. Both were looking at him askance after he had let them through a set of secret passages. But Hermione was soon distracted by the sheer amount of literature in the library.

Neville sight, and then said, "Easy girl, breathe, Hermione."

Harry added, "Remember, we've probably only got forty or so minutes. I know the way to the Transfiguration classroom, but not how long it is going to take."

Hermione nodded distractedly, and went off toward the stacks.

"I think we should stay with her. If we let her go back there alone... Well let's just say I don't want to have to explain it to our head of house about how we lost one of yearmates to the library."

Neville paled at the thought of a hacked off McGonagall and the two made to catch up to Hermione. They eventually had to drag/threaten her with a teacher's displeasure to get her out of there. They made their way to Transfiguration, getting there ten minutes early.

McGonagall was to Harry's expectations. Stern and not to be crossed. She explained in no uncertain terms that there was to be no playing around in her classroom. She then changed her desk to a pig and then back again. What followed was then a great degree of complicated notes, and then they were told to change a matchstick into a needle.

Harry had started to notice that something was off with Neville's spellwork. He tried as hard as he could, but it seemed everything seemed to just splutter into failure. The only thing Harry noticed was that Neville's wand appeared significantly older than not only his own, the those of every other member of their class. After having been the first to change his match into a needle, Harry sat back and decided to have a quick chat with Alistair.

'Al, what would happen if a witch or wizard was forced to use a wand that didn't pick him or her?'

'Simple. The spell results would simply be worse. The worse the match between wand and wizard the more likely the spell would simply fail.'

'So do you think Neville may have a badly matched wand?'

'It is most definitely possible if the wand is not new like you have noticed... Ask.'

"Neville, I have to ask you, why does your wand seem so much older than everyone else's'."

"Because it belonged to my Dad. My Gran says I should be honored to use it..."

"But did the wand choose you?"

"What?"

"One of the first things that Ollivander said when I stepped into his store was that the wand chooses the wizard, and if your Gran decided unilaterally that you would be better off using your father's wand than one that would be yours..."

Neville grimaced at this, before a voice behind them, McGonagall's voice behind them to be precise, set them both sitting straight up, "I think I am going to have to write a letter to the Dowager Longbottom. It is all well and good to hold one's father up as an example, but what your Grandmother is doing is going to do more harm than good in the long run. Keep trying Mr. Longbottom, but don't be discouraged."

Neville and Harry just stared at each other for a few moments, then Neville went back to trying to transfigure his matchstick, and Harry idly tried to return his needle to its prior form. Class ended with only Hermione and Harry having completed the task. The three then went off to lunch.

A/N: All thanks to the reviewers. And this one has been a pain to write. A large, massive pain, centered around my left buttock. (8/17/10 - 8/18/10)

Chapter 7: The Flamels

Sitting down to lunch, Harry couldn't help but scarf down even more food than he did at breakfast. He was nowhere near as big a pig about it as his cousin was at meals, but he still managed to pack it way. After a good solid twenty-five minutes of eating, he was finally started to get full.

Alistair took this chance to get a word in edge wise, 'A pair of people just crossed into the wards, and if they are who I think they are, I am going to have to speak to them. Are you finished, or should I get a house-elf to take me to them?'

Spearing one last piece of meat with his fork and popping it in his mouth, 'I think I'll survive until dinner. By the by, are you, at some point, going to tell me what in the blazes a 'house-elf' is?'

'Yeah, well just go out to the entrance hall and wait for them. Take me off on your way out, put me in a pocket for a minute, I'll change to my tattered state.'

Harry looked around for a minute, rolled his eyes, and thought, 'Everyone is too busy eating, just change back now, I'll take you off and carry you out. Your plan is overly complicated.'

Muttering something about missing a chance at horsing around, Al shifted back, Harry snatched him off his head and made his way out of the Great Hall, and he thought that he wasn't the only one who needed to have fun in life. He leaned against a wall, holding the Hat in his hands, waiting for whoever Alistair was waiting for.

Less than ten minutes later, a man and woman walked into the castle. They both appeared to be in their mid-forties, the man was of average height, wore his black robes open with slacks of a dark gray and a button down shirt of a lighter shade, his dark hair peppered with gray. The woman was a head shorter, with a skirt and blouse in two slightly different shades of dark green showing under her robes, and her hair was fiery red with streaks of white.

"That them Al?"

"Yup."

Shrugging, Harry made his way over to them, the Hat held before him in both hands, and told them, "The Sorting Hat assumed you would wish to speak with... Hey Al, are you a he or an it?"

"Nobody likes a smart alack, Harry."

The pair, whoever they were, just started at Harry for a few moments. He hadn't quite gotten used to the attention yet, but he could ignore it. He could ignore a lot of things.

The man broke the silence first, while gently taking the Hat from Harry's hands, "Yes, yes, Alistair was just the entity I needed to speak to. Thank you for bringing him to us."

"Your welcome, sir. Alistair, I'll see you whenever I see you."

The hat made a bobbing motion in the man's hands and said, "Yes, Harry, I'll have someone get me back to you when we're finished. You can find your way to and from the Tower from here I assume, and it is fairly difficult to miss the greenhouses, so I assume you can make your way to your next class?"

"Yup. Enjoy your little meeting." Harry then made his way off to the tower, maybe he would take a nap, let all that food settle...

When he was out of earshot, the woman sadly spoke, "He has Lily's eyes, Nic."

And the man nodded glumly, "But he looks just like James, Pen."

Alistair decided not to let the two stew, and interjected, "Yes, yes, anyone who knew his parents can say those things. Now as to why you're here..."

Nic, interrupted, "The reason we came here... but now we have something else to speak about. You made him a Ward of the castle. What happened?"

"We can talk on the way to the third floor..."

Stepping through the portrait hole with a yawn, Harry, working through what he remembered of last night, assumed the pair were the Nicolas and Perenelle that Alistair mentioned, and that the Headmaster had used something of theirs to bait a trap for Voldemort. Apart from that, he was fairly clueless as to what was going, not that he really cared much beyond understanding the basic facts. He stuffed what he assumed he would need for Herbology in his bag, and then dropped onto his bed to at least rest his eyes for a bit.

Stopping at outside the place where the object had been hidden, Nic, Pen, and Al had been talking about Harry all the way up there, with Alistair painting the general picture of Harry's so-called life so far. The two had dark looks on their faces, and Alistair only made one comment, "Don't hurt Fluffy, that would make Hagrid cry for a week. At least."

Nicolas stuck the Hat on his head and stood to one side of the door, with Perenelle on the other, and they then used a spell to rip the door off its hinges, blowing out into the hallway and into the opposite wall. They then each sent a half a dozen quick stunners into the room and calmly walked in, the first guardian, a Cerberus, was out cold already.

Levitating the animal off the trap door, the pair dropped down, Nicolas holding on to his passenger. Hitting the bottom they both immediately and viciously set fire to the Devil's Snare, destroying it in a matter of seconds. Walking into the room of flying keys, they simply blew the door into the next room. Not even breaking stride into the chess room they came and started blowing up the various chess pieces, who were sent fleeing in terror, out of the way of the duo with the hat.

"What the hell was Albus thinking with these quote, defenses, unquote, Alistair?" Nicolas asked.

Alistair grunted, "Probably the exact same thing he was thinking when he consigned Harry to a decade of hell."

Perenelle grimaced, "Was it really that bad? I know we were either first or second on their list of guardians following his godparents."

"We won't know for certain until Albus unseals their wills on the 23rd."

Having finished turning the chess set into fragments, they burst the door into the next room and started throwing overpowered cutting curses at the offending troll. It fell within fifteen seconds. Walking into the next room, they cast a simple flame freezing charm to get by the wall of flame on the far side of the room. And in the final chamber, sitting on a pedestal, was the Sorcerer's Stone.

Picking it up and dropping it into a pocket, Nicolas said, "We really do have more to talk about, Alistair."

Dusting off his robes Harry, walked away from the greenhouses, trailing shortly behind Neville and Hermione who were animatedly discussing this class. He could tell that they had both liked it, Hermione because it was a class and Neville seemed to genuinely enjoy the subject. It reminded him a bit too much of his Aunt's garden.

There was something bothering him at the back of his mind, something he just could not put words to. He stuffed it away so he could examine it later. As he was doing that, he walked into the Entrance Hall and a short... creature... with large floppy ears and over-sized eyes appeared out of nowhere. Harry couldn't help but think that this was a house-elf, while he jumped a foot away out of surprise.

It piped out in a squeaky voice, "Master Hatty says Harry Potter should come see him in Meeting Room 7."

He nodded and thanked the elf... who made a squeeing sound for some bizarre reason before disappearing, and headed off toward where he thought the room was.

"So you have given us the generalities of what happened to him, may Albus burn in hell, but how is he, Alistair?"

"Nicolas, I can only tell you if you two are serious about taking custody of him."

Nicolas and Perenelle looked at each other for a moment.

"James and Lily were some of my favorite people of the last two centuries, Pen, especially since Albus has apparently gone insane."

Perenelle sighed at this, "Quite frankly Nic, I never saw what you did in that codger. But I agree, we should see what we can for him, for James and Lily's sakes at the very least."

Alistair, once again clearing his non-existent throat, "So if you two are agreed?"

They both nodded, their faces a combination of anger and sadness at what happened to the child of their friends.

"So a quick rundown of how Harry is. Physically he is better than he should be, and after a few months of various potions to help fix what is either underdeveloped or what didn't heal properly, he should be a normal eleven year old wizard. Mentally, there is nothing we can do for him without massive use of memory charms, and quite frankly those could do more harm than good. So no matter what we do, it is doubtful that he is ever going to go back to thinking like a kid. Emotionally he is the worst off. I lied to everyone when I described his emotional state. No one there needed to know that though he will be fine in mind and body, he is almost dead emotionally. Anything larger than mild excitement is crushed with an instant ruthlessness that is actually quite frightening. In fact I didn't want him to realize it either. I have no idea how he would react."

The look of sadness on their faces was heartbreaking. They remembered that both of his parents were extremely emotional people. Lily was kind with a temper that sent even the boldest running to hide under their beds, while James was a jokester who saw humor in everything. That their child could barely feel anything, they felt that was the greatest crime Dumbledore had committed thus far.

Pen pulled a handkerchief from a pocket, and dabbed at her eyes, "Is there anything else you think we should know?"

"I have a few suspicions. He's only about average magically but..."

Nicolas's face blanked with rage as he interrupted Alistair, "He was committing deliberate acts of magic before his parents' deaths. I remember a time when he summoned a cup of juice right out of

Lily's hands. And neither of them were surprised at what he had done. He had done it before!"

"So it is now no longer a suspicion. You should get him checked thoroughly for blocks and bindings on his magic, maybe more."

Perenelle made a noise that sounded suspiciously like an irate cat, "You think that... that..." She launched off into some very interesting use of vulgarities in at least half a dozen languages in an attempt to describe just what she thought of Dumbledore. "Explain to me just why we shouldn't go kill Dumbledore, right now?"

"Because Perenelle, Tom Riddle, Lord Voldemort was in this castle just yesterday. If he hadn't been, if it was still only a possibility that he was still hanging around, we could possibly do without Dumbledore. How he was, and still is, Dumbles is the only one who has ever been able to stand up to him in a fight. Sorry, you two, but you may have more skill in your pinkies than Dumbledore may have in his entire body, but even working together you two can barely hold a candle to him."

They both grunted disconsolately at this.

Harry knocked on the door to the Meeting Room, figuring that if the Hat had wanted Harry to come to him in this room something had to be up. The door opened with no visible cause, so he entered and when the hat and the pair from earlier were silent, he decided to take a seat.

Alistair broke the raging quiet, "Harry, meet Nicolas and Perenelle Flamel. Among other things, they were friends of your parents. They figured out, in short order, that you had been made a Ward of the school..."

And Nicolas broke in, "And we wanted to know if you like us to become your guardians."

And for the first time while at the school, Harry's face showed something other than the evenness he normally kept, the minor annoyance he sometimes felt, or the mild excitement he showed. It went blank for all of ten seconds, before a look of hunger came across his face. He felt something flutter in his chest, just left of center.

He spoke in a small quiet, sounding for the first time like an eleven year old, "You knew my parents? I... I..."

He fought with himself, attempted to crush the feeling down, like he always did, and barely managed to, no longer really understanding why he did it. He brought his face back to evenness, but it took a minute to get his voice to work again.

"I... I think I'd like that."

Nicolas and Perenelle smiled, and she said, "We'll need to speak to your Head of House. There are probably a large number of things that Albus decided to skip when he had you brought back into our world, so I think we are going to need to take you out of the castle for a few days at the very least so we can get everything done."

Nicolas nodded, and picked up the thread of the conversation, "Probably, and more than we would like to think. Now there are number of things that we are going to have to speak with Alistair about, do you want to sit in on it?"

"No, I'm fine. I assume you are going to want me there when you speak to Professor McGonagall?"

All three voiced their assent.

"Then I'll take my leave."

Harry heaved his way out of the chair, and left the room.

After the door closed, Perenelle put forth, "So... his parents..."

Nicolas simply grunted and muttered a few nasty things about Dumbledore in French.

Alistair wished he was allowed to read more than Harry's uppermost thoughts. He had what he thought was a fairly good idea of how Harry's mind worked, but when he had watched the young man's history, he had to take the role of an outside observer, so he didn't know what was really going on in Harry's head apart from his glimpse for the purpose of sorting. Even when he was in Harry's mindscape, the magics that composed of his own existence did not

allow him to go poking around anymore than was necessary to teach Harry.

Harry propped himself up against a wall a few corridors away and shook his head.

'Nothing is wrong. Any... any person would want to know about their parents if they didn't know them. Nothing is wrong with me. I'm normal.'

'That sounds like some fairly thin justification.'

'Shut up!'

'Talking to yourself is a sure sign of madness.'

'Only when you don't have anyone to talk to.'

'Well, what about your new acquaintances... surely you can talk to them.'

'I barely even know them. I don't need anyone anyways. All I need is me.'

'And maybe if you repeat it often enough, it may even become true.'

Harry screwed his eyes shut and shoved that particular voice down. It and the others had been his only company in the long dark of the cupboard. That particular voice had taken a long time to teach him the lesson he had taught Hermione in a few minutes. But sometimes it could just be too rational.

He opened his eyes and saw that he had sunk down to the floor. Picking himself off and dusting off his clothes, he made his way to the Tower.

A/N2: For those of you who are curious, September the 23rd, 1991, was the Autumnal Equinox. And a full moon!

A/N: Once more, I'd like to thank the academy... I mean reviewers. :P

Another pain to write, so much so I had to skip a day. :(

I have plans running through my head for the time periods covered for the next four books, but I can't focus on this one. Many ideas for those, and a few for later parts of this year, none for the current time period. (8/18/10 - 8/20/10)

10,000+ Hits; 5,000+ Visitors!

Chapter 8: The Rest of the Week

Harry sat down in Professor McGonagall's office with the Flamels following dinner. Alistair was sitting on the desk, and the rest were in straight backed chairs. Nicolas had just voiced his intent to remove Harry from the castle for coming weekend in order to both get Harry a complete physical and to go over his affairs at Gringotts, along with voicing the possibility he may have to leave for a few other weekends, in case anything else came up. She was more than a little irritated that it was Hagrid that Dumbledore had sent to Harry, instead of the Deputy Headmistress as was normal. When he had said he would take care of it, she assumed he was going himself. She agreed, only because this was a mess the Headmaster has caused.

Stepping out of the office, Perenelle asked, "When is your last class on Friday?"

After putting the freshly re-disguised Alistair back on his head, he pulled his schedule out of a pocket and glanced at it, "Unless Professor McGonagall manages to procure a new Defense instructor by then, Herbology lets out at four."

"It'll be unlikely that will happen. And from what Alistair told us about those sadists that raised you, it would probably be easier if we bought you clothes and other essentials rather than packing for the weekend, so just show up outside of the doors to the Entrance Hall after class."

He nodded and started walked toward the Tower and his bed.

Mulling over the remains of his breakfast, and having been the first Lion at the meal, Harry was leafing through his potions books. He was interrupted however by the Twins sitting down on either side of him.

"Was the Hat serious about..."

"...what he said yesterday?"

Quirking an eyebrow at the pair, Harry poked the plain black cap he had on, and said, "Which comment was that?"

"It called you..."

"... the Son of Prongs!"

'That I did. Ask them to show you that map of theirs, and have you activate it, but instead of whatever it is they tell you to say to activate it, instead say, "Another Potter solemnly swears he is up to no good." I think you will enjoy it. If they don't tell you what to do, just place your wand on it and say the phrase.'

"He's talking about some sort of map..."

The twins leaned forward and shared a look. The one on Harry's left stuffed the firsties's books in his bag and grabbed it, while the other hauled the raven haired eleven year old to his feet. The pair of them then hauled Harry out of the Hall and into the nearest empty classroom.

"Well then..."

"... if the Hat says..."

"... you are the son of Prongs..."

"... then let's see if you know what this bit of parchment is."

And then they handed him a piece of parchment, and Harry pulled out his wand, placed it on the sheet, and intoned, "Another Potter solemnly swears he is up to no good."

The Twins shared a startled look, and moved to either side of Harry to watch, as the Hat trailed out line after line of text.

Messrs. Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, and Prongs
Purveyors of Aids to Magical Mischief-Makers
are proud to present to the next generation
THE MARAUDER'S MAP

Prongs would like to congratulate his son on getting his hands on this map.

Moony also extends his congratulations, and hopes this map aids in many fine pranks.

Wormtail bids the Heir of Potter a good day, and hopes he has the hair of his mother, whoever she is.

Padfoot extends his hope that the Prongslet has found this map in his first year so it can get more use out of it.

And then, instead of the aforementioned map, the parchment filled with a list of commands and explanations of what they do.

The left twin starts, "George, do you know what this means?"

"That the map is obviously more useful than it already is?"

"Obviously, but it also means that we now have a partner in crime in our house!"

"Well that was more than obvious, my good twin. Besides which, we weren't exactly going to let Ronnikins in on the pranking, even if he had been in Gryffindor."

"Yes, well it is sad to say our brother has too big of a mouth to keep the secrets necessary to be a good prankster."

"And if anything, we can give Harrykins here a chance."

But Harry had heard absolutely none of this, his eyes were locked on the handwriting on 'Prongs' a.k.a. James Potter, and he was running his finger along the line of text.

The twin on the left snapped his fingers under Harry's nose, "Hey, Harry, snap out of it."

"Huh? Sorry, Fred, I just got a little distracted." He handed the map to George. "I've still got plenty of time before potions, so I think I'm going to have a bit of a lay down."

As Harry exited the room, the twins shared a worried look.

After having dropped his bag on top of his trunk, hung Alistair up on the headboard, and kicked off his trainers, Harry laid down on the bed stretching out.

"You okay kid?"

"I'll be fine Al, I just need to rest my eyes for a bit."

He did indeed close his eyes, but he didn't rest. Instead a number of the voices started in on him.

'Just like how you reacted yesterday, when hearing you'd be taken in by friends of you parents. Going to keep going on with the farce that you are fine? So willing to point out a flaw in another that you once had, and help her fix it, but still so blind to your own.' The calm voice, the voice of reason, lightly chided.

'Anyone, anyone, in my position would want to get as much information on their parents as possible.'

'Not really, what those berks did to you for the last decade is not what most people in your position go through. They have families that they care about, that care about them, families that don't even thing about whether or not the one they are raising is their direct blood or not. May the Dursleys burn in hellfire for what they did.' This voice, slightly edgier, and more easily angered, had always wanted to do to the Dursleys what they did to them, or at the very least seek recompense within the system.

'I never wanted to hurt anyone. And I would rather just be shut of them, even if it means I can never have revenge... which has always sounded a bit hollow and petty cause to me anyway.'

A third voice chimed in, this one always sounded as a mixture of sadness and hope, but had still always been one of the strongest, even if it also spoke the least, 'Harming others will only harm you. Pain is not something to be spread. It is to be fought and destroyed. Yes, there should be justice, else criminals would just run free and repeat their crimes.'

'I know. I know.'

Making his way down to the dungeons , he leaned against the wall outside of the potions class room. He was the first there, mainly because he was a good forty-five minutes early. So he spent that time with Alistair strengthening the physical defenses of his mind, reinforcing the doors with super-hard magical woods and metals, creating complex locks, and ensuring air-tightness everywhere. Over the curtain wall, Alistair taught him how to build dome shaped barricade of nothingness that would force invaders to take a run at his walls instead of just going above them. At this point there were less than ten minutes before class, and Alistair decided that was enough for the day.

Neville and Hermione were standing near him giving him odd looks. Neville ventured to ask in a whisper, "You've been standing there with your eyes closed since we got here, and that was fifteen minutes ago. What were you doing?"

Sighing, Harry pulled himself away from the wall, "It ties in to what happened during the opening feast. So..."

Hermione chimed in, "Ask you again later?"

"Indeed."

At this point the door to the classroom opened, of its apparently own accord. The class shuffled in, Gryffindors taking on side of the classroom, and the Slytherins the other. Harry and Neville, at Neville's insistence, took the table at the extreme back of the classroom. Neville started talking about the horror stories that he

had heard from older Lions about potions. All Harry did in response was smirk.

A minute later, Professor Snape entered the classroom, tossing pairs of books on each table as he passed. The books were titled 'The Basics of Potion Making' with no author credited. He then stood at the front of the class and looked each and every Gryffindor in the eyes, ending with Harry.

A force made a quick, brutal run at Harry's mental defenses, and he winced when it rebounded off, like a tennis ball off a wall. In the moment between the first attack and any that may have followed, Alistair overlaid his own defenses upon Harry's mind.

When Snape made his second run at the Potter brat's mind, which was far better protected than what Albus had told him it would be, he instead found himself rushing , and then sealed, into a bare stone room. The only thing in it was a white marble plinth with the Sorting Hat sitting on it. Snape would have paled, if he hadn't already been as white as a sheet.

"SEVERUS SNIDGET SNAPE, you are already on probation. You have just taken a run at the mind of a Ward of Hogwarts. I assumed you got by the stipulation to treat all students equally in that if you were going to get into Harry's mind, you would also have to do that to the entire student body. This is the first warning of your probation. And any repeat uses of Legilimency against anyone in this castle will result in your immediate sacking. Now, GET OUT!"

Back outside of Alistair's mindscape Snape stared at Harry a few seconds longer than anyone else. He then shook his head, and gave a little speech about potions making to the class. He then told them that all they would do this class would be reading the books he had passed out. If they finished the book, they were to read it again, and again if necessary. Anyone asking questions would be docked house points. Their homework would be to read the book again.

They had transfiguration again, followed by History of Magic.

Since Binns had to be replaced, but all students outside the final two years were already down a course, he kept teaching until the Deputy Head could find a replacement. Alistair encouraged Harry to read the material outside of class, and instead take a nap, rather than

fight off the somnolence inducing effects of the ghost's voice. After five minutes, Harry had agreed, and was out like a light.

After class however, Hermione, who had sat next to him during that class, started in on him, "Harry, how can you ever expect to pass History if you have your eyes closed?"

"Because for the first five minutes of class, all he said came directly from our text, word for word. It was the first chapter."

Her mouth just opened and closed for a minute, and then she pulled out her text as the three of them went to the library to wait for dinner. After quickly reading the chapter mentioned, she made a distressed sound. "But still he's a teacher we should..."

"Hermione, if I make a suggestion, he is not human. He used to be, but he is not any longer. Treating something that isn't human as human... I can only think of it as something dangerous to do."

"But he's a professor. He is part of the authority."

"And when I tell you about what happened last night, you will understand why I am wary of most of the authority figures in this castle, save our Head of House."

She could only stare at Harry for the rest of the walk to the library. She wondered what he was hiding, because that was all he could be doing, hiding something.

The rest of the week continued on as it had begun, with Harry aiding the twins in turning the hair of the entirety of House Slytherin green and silver. This involved a trip into the kitchens with Harry distracting the house elves. He used very shiny objects.

Friday at breakfast, Neville received a Remembrall from his Gran. Picking it up it stayed clear, and so he stuffed it in his bag.

However, after lunch, the Gryffindors had flying lessons with Slytherin (who most of whom were still sporting the colored hair). Malfoy and Ronald had been getting into git contests about how experienced they were on brooms.

Neville calmly told his broom "Up!" and it was in his hand, like Harry, but Hermione whimpered it. Maybe she was afraid of heights?

They were both proven to be gits about their broomriding expertise when first Madam Hooch had corrected Draco's grip, and then when told to kick off, Ron shot up into the air and broke his wrist when he fell. She assigned Draco and his muscle to haul Ron to the hospital wing.

Harry enjoyed flying, and he figured with all the gold in his vault, he'd get himself a broom next year, if only so he could relax using it. After class, Hooch pulled him aside, and pointed out the rules only stated that first years were not allowed to own brooms, and that a number of players on the House Quidditch teams used school brooms. He nodded and told her that he understood. He had talked quite a bit with the twins about Quidditch, it seemed like something he might want to try... in fact they had mentioned that the House team needed a seeker.

A bit dirty and slightly disheveled, Harry, Neville and Hermione made their way back into the castle. Harry not really feeling up to giving a full explanation, started talking when they got near the doors and the two adults near the entrance.

"My new guardians are taking me out of the castle for the weekend to take care of some things they said should have been taken care of when I was first taken to Diagon Alley but weren't. I'll see you two on Sunday."

Before they could even respond, he sped up and greeted the two adults, and they headed off towards the gates.

Hermione huffed, and said, "He keeps entirely too many secrets..."

Neville shrugged, "Everyone has a right to secrets Hermione, and I have a feeling that Harry will most likely talk, he keeps saying so. But it will probably be later rather than sooner."

All she had to say to this was to huff again.

A/N: Again thanks to the reviewers. This one was easier than the last. And the next probably will be easy too. And hopefully will be out quickly to make up for the lack of an update yesterday. I really want to get through the first and second years, but I do NOT want to do any time jumps longer than a couple months. But most of all I can't wait till fourth year. Big changes are going to come to the Tri-Wizard Cup.

100+ Reviews! (8/20/10)

Chapter 9: Shopping and Gringotts

Walking towards the gates, Nicolas and Perenelle, who told him not to call them Mr. and Mrs. Flamel, nor sir and ma'am, asked about his week. He talked about how classes had gone, and about someone talking a run at his mental defenses in potions. He talked most about flying lessons, and his intent to at least try out for the house team, even if he could not own his own broom this year.

After going through the gates, Nicolas directed Harry to grab onto his forearm, and not let go until he said so. Warily Harry did so, and then it felt like he was being dragged through a long rubber tube. He cursed mildly while it was happening, and continued for a few seconds after he was vaguely aware of Nicolas telling him he could let go. Perenelle threatened to wash his mouth out with soap if he used that kind of language again. He clamped his mouth shut, just a tad too quickly. They then explained about apparation, and how he had been side-alonged.

Now that he had a chance to look around, he noticed that they appeared to be in Diagon Alley. For the next three hours, they took him from store to store in the Alley. They got his eyes checked out, and the new glasses he didn't know he needed were bought, and though they were spelled to be self correcting up to a certain point, it was suggested that he get his eyes checked yearly. He also got a dozen robes, a half dozen cloaks, some with hoods, and a pair of dragonhide boots. They ordered him a new trunk, charmed to be feather light, with three compartments, each triple the size of a normal trunk, with the Potter family coat of arms on it. At the same shop they got him a backpack that had the center pouch that was four times its normal size, with two side pockets that were double their normal size. Anything inside the closed bag would be almost

unbreakable, and it was all feather light. It also had the family coat of arms on it.

Harry didn't even know he had a family coat of arms.

Harry managed to drag them to look at brooms for fifteen minutes.

They then took him for some food, which he once more ate quite a bit of, and then out into muggle London for another two hours to finish up his wardrobe. He was well and truly shut of shopping by the time he had been brought to the Flamel's home... to his new home. It felt strange to think of any place as home. The Dursleys' had simply been where he had resided, but never home. He was shown to his room, with his own bathroom, and the many bags from the shopping trip were unshrunk and deposited in the room. He was too tired to go through his memories of the day, so after hanging Alistair on the headboard, Harry passed out for the night, fully clothed on top of the covers.

Waking up, Harry found that someone had draped a blanket over him in the middle of the night. He blinked for a minute, and then lay there confused. No one had ever done anything like that for him before. Ever. It felt... nice. Why would either Nicolas or Perenelle do that for him? They barely knew him. In fact why were they doing any of this?

He shook his head, and stomped hard on those thoughts. He sat up, crossed his legs, and started to go through his memories from the day before. He noticed that the more he worked on storing his memories, the easier it was to recall what he knew. Finishing with that, he pulled Al on his head, and they double checked the defenses on his mind.

"Not too bad Harry. These are actually fairly impressive for purely physical mental defenses. That is the furthest most people who practice Occlumency go. Now do you want to go further or stop here?"

The answering grin was all Alistair needed.

"Right, ask an obvious question, get an obvious answer. Now onto the second half of White mind defenses. misdirection. The fact is

you are already practicing a form of it. Are all the books here in your mind actually populated with memories of information?"

"No, only about a tenth, if that."

"Exactly. If anyone ever makes it this far, they will have to take longer to actually find anything of value. One thing you will want to take the time to do is to put something, anything, in each book. Even if it is only meaningless poetry. Make them take even longer. Now to actually build it into your defenses..."

Alistair then directed Harry into disguising both the outer gate and the main doors, making them look like regular walls, and a few dummy rooms were added to keep anyone from realizing that the main entrances were hidden. It would take time to put details into these defenses, but that could be done at Harry's leisure. With the equivalent of the coming week's 'lessons' in Occlumency, Harry decided to go back over everything he had learned in classes last week.

Harry was brought out of his studying by Nicolas tapping on his shoulder.

"Practicing your Occlumency, Harry?"

"Not really, I was going over what I learned this week."

"Any use of Occlumency, whether for defense or memory recollection, works toward improving it. The more you fiddle with your walls and other defenses, the easier they are to build and rebuild. And the more you sort through your memories, and the more you recall them, the easier that becomes. Come on, Pen is making breakfast, and keeping her waiting is something not even the bravest Lions like to do."

Climbing out of bed and stretching, he followed Nicolas to the kitchen. Now that he was actually paying attention to his surroundings, which due to exhaustion, he didn't last night, the warm colors on the walls and the dark woods felt cozy. He couldn't help but feel he might enjoy living here.

Getting into the kitchen, he figured out where he was expected to sit from the half a dozen familiar looking potions sitting in front of it. He

sighed and sat down, and Alistair said, "Stop your bellyaching. If you don't drink them, you're just gonna drag out your treatment longer. And I will still have to deal with your complaining."

Both Nicolas and Perenelle chuckled at this, and then about five minutes after Harry had downed the potions, they tucked in to breakfast. Nic and Pen talked to Harry about how his father had been a Chaser on the Gryffindor house team, with Harry asking about how good he was at it, and they recounted one of the games they had watched.

After the meal, Harry was told that today they were going to go to Gringotts to speak with the manager of the Potter Accounts, in order to go over the details of Harry's trust fund. Hopefully, they would also at least get to read James and Lily's wills. They had an appointment in two hours.

Dressed in plain black slacks, with a rust colored button up shirt, blood-red robes, and his new boots (which he had really taken a liking to), the three walked into Gringotts at quarter past ten. They made their way to the office of the manager of the Potter Accounts, and told the receptionist that they awaited his pleasure. Harry had been given a crash course the day before in how to relate to goblins by Nicolas and Perenelle.

Basically it boiled down to, arrive early for meetings, tell the goblins that you are ready for whenever they have time to deal with you, which will probably be fairly quickly, get to the point(s) of the meeting as quickly as possible, and whatever you do, do not be arrogant. Most of it had to revolve around the fact that goblins believed one thing in their dealings with humans: time is money.

If you can get that through your head, you should at least be able to achieve lukewarm relations with goblins, instead of disdain.

At twenty past ten, they were let into the office, and without a nameplate, or any introductions, Harry recognized the goblin sitting behind the desk.

"Griphook?"

Nicolas and Perenelle stared at Harry for just a moment, and then they looked at the aforementioned goblin.

The goblin grinned (not showing any teeth, it was actually rather unsettling given the facial features of the race), and said, "You must have both a fairly good memory and a good eye for details, Mr. Potter, because most of your kind cannot tell one goblin from another. Please, all three of you, have a seat. I assume this meeting has to do with the repeated and rather rude transgressions of one Albus Dumbledore?"

The three nodded as they sat down, but before they could say anything more, Griphook continued, "Then you are most likely here to both get the details on Mr. Potter's trust fund, and to see if you can catch a glance at the wills of James and Lily Potter?"

Again, nods, and he plowed on forward, wasting no time, he pulled a folder from off his desk and passed it to Nicolas, "That is everything Mr. Potter will ever need to know about his trust fund, however as for the wills, we will be unable to give you the individual wills of James and Lily Potter."

Catching onto a specific word in that sentence, Harry asked, "Does that mean they have a joint will?"

Again Griphook grinned, and now it was his turn to nod. "Yes, their individual wills were superseded by a joint will that was written, signed, and witnessed in the first week of October, 1981, and even though their individual wills were sealed by order of the Wizengamot, their joint will never was, but it was written in such a way that it can only be executed at the request of either the Potter Heir or his guardians. The reason this will wasn't sealed was because Dumbledore never knew about it."

Perenelle blinked for a moment and then said, "Then can we see the will?"

"Of course." And the goblin then passed a scroll bound in a black ribbon to Perenelle. While she read that, and Nicolas read the report on Harry's trust fund, Harry asked Griphook, "So why were you waiting to take me down to my vault when I first came to Diagon Alley?"

"Because it is goblin tradition for account managers to take the heirs to major accounts down themselves on the first visit to each vault. I did not see any reason for Dumbledore's then apparent but undetermined meddling to interfere with such a tradition."

"Thank you, Griphook."

"Your welcome, Mr. Potter."

Perenelle passed the will to Nicolas, who passed the trust fund report to Harry.

Vault 687

The Trust Fund of Harry James Potter

The vault is to be filled to ten thousand (10,000) galleons each year, upon Harry James Potter's birthday July the Thirty-First (31st).

Withdrawals as of this year:

Two hundred (200) galleons, seventy (70) sickles, and one hundred (100) knuts withdrawn physically from vault by Harry James Potter;

One thousand, five hundred (1,500) galleons to Hogwarts tuition paid in full on September the First (1st).

Summary of withdrawals of all previous years:

Ten thousand (10,000) galleons withdrawn yearly on July the Thirtieth (30th) starting in Nineteen hundred and eighty-two (1982) by the financial guardian of Harry James Potter, Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore. One thousand (1000) of which was always converted to British Pounds upon withdrawal.

"So Dumbledore has been stealing from me..."

Griphook nodded solemnly, "I am afraid so, and since he was legally declared your financial guardian, there is no recompense you can seek. However we should be glad that with the sealing of your

parents' apparent wills, 100,000 galleons was all that he could steal. If he had had access to your family vaults, I am afraid the damage could have been much, much worse."

"Do you have any idea where there money converted into pounds went?"

"There is no proof, however there are records of there being deposits made by either your aunt or uncle on or soon after the 30th of July each year. Since hearing of the mistreatment of your person by them, I have forwarded this evidence, however circumstantial, to the DMLE."

"Thank you again, Griphook."

"I am only doing my job."

Harry then passed the trust fund report to Perenelle, and received the Will.

This Being the Last Will and Testament

Of James Charles and Lily Rose Potter

We, James Charles Potter and Lily Rose Potter (nee Evans), being of sound mind and body do declare this our last will and testament, voiding all previous.

First, to the custody of our one and only child, Harry James Potter, we leave him to the following people in order:

::: First (1st), Sirius Orion Black, his Godfather.

::: Second (2nd), Alice Gillian Longbottom, his Godmother.

::: Third (3rd), Nicolas and Perenelle Flamel, good friends of the family.

::: Fourth (4th), Amelia Susan Bones, a good friend of his father and his co-worker.

::: Fifth (5th), Minerva Madeleine McGonagall a, good friend of his mother and her mentor.

::: There is a secondary list to be held with our account manager if none of the above are available or able.

::: Under no circumstances is he to go to Petunia Lilac Dursley (nee Evans).

Secondly, to Peter Pettigrew, who if we die during the war, has betrayed our Secret. We leave a curse and thirty (30) sickles to follow him through the Death Veil.

Thirdly, to those who have custody of our child, we leave a yearly allowance of two thousand (2000) galleons, to see that he is cared for.

Finally, to our son, Harry Potter, we leave all the rest.

::: He is to have access to his trust vault, and from however old he is at the reading of this will up until his eleventh (11th) birthday, he is to be allowed to withdraw no more than one hundred (100) galleons a month. Afterwards he is allowed to withdraw no more than (200) galleons from his trust vault, with the exception of school shopping for which he can withdraw an additional (200) galleons. Also at the age of eleven (11), he is to be given non-monetary access to any family vaults he is found to be heir to. A blood/magic heir ceremony is to be performed at both his and Gringotts connivance. He is also to be given repeatable, return portkeys to any properties he is heir to. He is also to receive letters from his mother on both his eleventh (11th) and fifteenth (15th) birthdays.

Signed,

James Charles Potter and Lily Rose Potter

Witnessed,

Alice Gillian Longbottom and Franklin Alastor Longbottom

Harry just blinked several times after he finished reading the will. He glanced up to see Griphook sliding an envelope across the desk for him. Harry pocketed it.

Nicolas broke the quiet, "I'd always known Sirius was innocent, but now we can prove it. Griphook, can you get an official copy of the will to the DLME, along with copies to where ever they are needed to execute it?"

"Of course. I shall start it immediately. As to Lord Black, I shall contact his account manager and see to it that a solicitor is put on retainer and notified that he will finally have a trial."

Harry counted on his fingers for a moment, said, "I think that is everything..." Looked to Nicolas and Perenelle both nodded, "... then I'd like to thank you for your valuable time, and bid you good day." Harry stood up with Nicolas and Perenelle, gave the goblin a short bow and said, "May your vaults always overflow, Griphook."

"May your vaults always overflow, Mr. Potter."

Before they left, Harry went down to his vault and withdrew his 200 galleon allowance for the month. He had a plan for that money...

A/N2: Next chapter, and next day, St. Mungo's. Hopefully I can get that written today too.

A/N: As I've said before, and will say again, thanks to all my reviewers. I appreciate you taking the time to give me feedback. Now, here's hoping to third in a day again.

Here is how I figure the money situation. School tuition is 1.5k a year, for everyone, payable either in installments monthly, per term, or all at once. Harry's guardians, whoever they were to be would get 2k a year. Harry himself gets 2.6k a year (hey, when I come up with the figures for the Potter Family Accounts in book 5's time frame, you'll see the reason for this). That's a total of 6.1k a year. That leaves 3.9k each year for whatever emergencies come up, and that is accessible by whoever Harry's financial guardian is.

I have yet to make any choices on what the average wizardly income is, but I am sure that these amounts combined with whatever income whoever would have gotten Harry would make for a comfy childhood.

And I can't believe that NONE of my reviewers have yet to even mention Healer Andromeda Tonks, the mother of everyone's favorite metamorphmagus. :(I ripped that role from the fact that she patches Hagrid up after the escape from the Dursleys' in DH.

Oh and anyone who wonders what the castle meant by 'short while' back in chapter 3. Well it is a thousand plus year old castle. Her definition of time is not the same as a human's.

(8/20/10) Third in a day.

Chapter 10: St. Mungo's and the Unthinkable

The rest of the day went rather uneventfully, with the group grabbing lunch in the Alley and then apparating back to the house. Though on the plus side, Harry finally got a tour. The house wasn't what most people would call large, but it was indeed, full. The kitchen was neat and organized, and also served as the dining room, albeit an extremely informal one. There was a sitting room with a number of plush chairs and couches, and a very large fireplace. There was a rather massive library when compared to the other rooms seen so far, and they had even set Harry up with his own potions lab. It was kinda like they were trying to tell him something.

When he was shown outside, it became apparent that the house was much larger on the inside than it was on the outside. From without it appeared to only be a three or so room fieldstone cottage. It sat in the middle of a clearing at least one hundred yards from the forest that surrounded it. There was a moderately sized greenhouse in sight, and some gardens. He was also shown the broomshed, and told that he could use any of the brooms in there. He was told that none of them were out of repair, though none of them were racing brooms.

With that said, he was left to his own devices. He spent most of the afternoon flying, enjoying the freedom of being in the sky, before landing after a couple of hours to go do some detail work on his defenses. Sitting cross legged on his bed, Harry pulled Alistair from where he left the hat that morning and dropped the headwear on his noggin.

"You weren't too bored today, were you Al?"

"Not at all, Harry. Nicolas was kind enough to give me access to the library here, so I was able to keep myself busy. Which was it today, St. Mungo's or Gringotts?"

They had a short conversation about what had happened that day, and Alistair got slightly peeved off that the headmaster had been stealing from Harry. Taking the hat back off his head, Harry started his meditation and entered his mindscape, and so got to work. He was gotten for dinner half an hour later. After a rather nice meal (definitely nicer and more filling than any with his old 'family'), he decided to poke around the library until he wanted to go to sleep. He found that they had a mix of magical and mundane fiction, along with countless magical theory texts, the vast majority of which he was sure were well above his skill level. Curling up with the children's version of 'The Tales of Beedle the Bard', Harry got a look at what stories he would have been told if his parents will had been executed. He viciously killed the nascent end of the rest of that thought...

'or if his parents had lived...'

He also got the more mature versions of the tales. Kinda like the tales of the Brothers Grimm, there were separate watered down stories, but then there were the older versions that weren't so nice.

The morning the next day was basically a repeat of the previous day, with the only difference was Alistair's insistence of tagging along to St. Mungo's, however the conversation at the breakfast table centered on the apparent innocence of Sirius Black.

Harry had started the talk, "Nicolas, why were you so sure that if the DMLE got my parent's will, that you could free the man who is apparently my godfather?"

"Well Harry, it involves a specific set of rather old and little used laws involving war-time wills and what they left to Pettigrew. The gist of it is, if a will, made during a recognized time of war, is brought into effect within a year of the writer's death, a set of phrases and bequeathments can be used to name who would have betrayed them to their deaths. Given your father's station as the Head of the Most Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter, the sentence would be death by an artifact called the Death Veil. What your parents actually left Peter Pettigrew was a death sentence."

"Oh."

After finishing breakfast, they left for St. Mungo's for a ten thirty appointment for a full physical with Healer Tonks. Getting there, and spending half an hour waiting and filling out forms, they were then led to an examination room. Which bore absolutely no resemblance to a muggle examination room. There were a few plush chairs, a tall stool, and a padded table.

After about five minutes of waiting, Healer Tonks walked in, and seeing Harry, the Hat, and his new guardians, smiled. "Well I must say Alistair, you worked quite quickly in getting Mr. Potter new guardians. And ones that take the initiative at that."

The hat chuckled, and responded, "I like to think that it is luck that had the basis in grinding all of Dumbledore's finely laid plans into finely spread dust."

Harry's response to this was a vicious, victorious smile.

"Well then, up on the stool, Mr. Potter, and let us get started."

Over the next half an hour, Healer Tonks cast countless detection and diagnostic spells, and was constantly taking notes. When she said she was finished and was about to leave to review her notes, Perenelle asked, "Have you checked for any blocks or seals on him?"

Healer Tonks blinked, worked her mouth for a moment, and then replied, "No, it isn't standard for a physical. Usually families keep track..." She trailed off in mid-sentence and hit herself in the forehead with the palm of her hand. "I've never studied the more complex detection spells for those kind of things, but I do know how to tell if they are there on the upper reaches of his being. If I get any sort of positive, I'll call in a consult."

Before she started, Nicolas added his own two knuts, "Could you also have him checked for monitoring and tracking charms, and mail interdictions?"

"Of course."

Six quick detection spells and swears later, Healer Tonks had a rather irate look on her face. Forcing a grin, Harry said, "I am guessing they all came up positive?"

Healer Tonks shot her patient a dirty look that shut him right up. "I am going to go get the best we have at this, I'll be back. And while they are doing their thing, I'll go over my notes from his physical."

She left the room, and Harry just sat on the stool, kicking his feet. He asked the hat, 'What did she mean by "upper reaches"?''

'Do you remember on conversation Monday on wizard physiology?'

'Of course...'

'This goes quite a ways beyond that basic chat we had. In essence, every witch or wizard is made up of five things. The first three, the three that lay closest to the surface and that are easiest to effect, are often referred to as the upper reaches or simply the surface. They are comprised of the body, the mind, and the magics of a person and how they interact with each other as individual pieces and as a whole.'

'Okay, that seems basic enough, and makes what generally resembles a logic shaped object.'

'Then there are the two deeper elements, the two things which are the deeper source of the energies of a person, and these are often called either the lower reaches or the depths. These are comprised of the Soul and the Blood. But when referring the Blood, we don't simply mean the red stuff that runs through your veins. What is meant is the life energy of the person.'

'Have to take that one a little more on belief, but once again, a vaguely logic shaped object.'

'And that is it in essence. And here comes Healer Tonks.'

'And she brought company. Quite a bit of it, in fact.'

Healer Tonks reentered the room, and Harry seemed to have a distant look on his face while he was wearing the Sorting Hat. He was possibly conversing with the artifact. What kind of person prefers to talk to a centuries old ratty hat, sure it was probably perfect companion for the types of people who became Headmaster, but an eleven year old? That being thought, she had come with the most experienced Healers who were trained in this sort of situation, three of them in fact. One, a rather short red headed man, specialized in blocks and seals on the upper reaches, while the other two, a tall black man with an Afro and a woman with blond hair, each worked in a different aspect of the depths.

"These are the absolute best St. Mungo's has to offer on dealing with various methods of blocking, sealing, and shackling of the various aspects of a witch or wizard. When they heard who they would be treating, they cleared the golf appointments."

The blond was the first of the three to speak, "If that is what I think it is, its presence on the patient is going to interfere with the diagnostics. "

Alistair responded with, "If you think that I am Alistair, the Sorting Hat of Hogwarts, then you are in fact correct. I just wish to say one thing before you start though. If my suspicions are correct, then the one who laid these bindings was Albus Dumbledore, so make sure you check for even the most esoteric of spells."

Harry then took him off his head and looked around for a place to set Alistair down, when Nicolas came over and set him on his head.

The trio then started their own series of detection and diagnostic spells. It was just a bit over forty-five minutes later before they had all finished. Each had gone off to go over the notes they took, and to confer with each other.

When they had finished, Healer Tonks came over and suggested they go get something to eat and then return to the hospital and meet her in her office. By that time, say an hour later, she and the Healers she had called in should have at least begun to get a handle on things.

All that said, it was an hour and a quarter later that saw the seven witches and wizards, plus one enchanted hat, sitting down in a conference room. Healer Tonks began the meeting, "Well as to the results of your physical, the only good news I have, is that apart from what already has been diagnosed, you are as healthy as an ox. I have had the potions you are talking altered slightly and blended together so that you only need to take a potion before each meal, instead of six before breakfast. We should be able to get those to you by Wednesday at the latest.

"However to the rather... numerous..."

The Healer with the Afro made an inarticulate sound of rage at this understatement.

The blond picked it up from there, "There are two ways which we can deal with the problem from here. First and foremost, no matter which course of action is chosen, we cannot remove the bindings in the depths without first clearing the upper reaches. "

Now the redhead broke in, "The first way is that we have almost daily examinations of you for about a year, carefully mapping and plotting just what was done to you. While we do this, we start planning on just how we are going disspell each individual enchantment. The soonest the upper reaches will be cleared on this course will be eighteen months."

Alistair decided now was as good a time to interrupt as any other, "And plan B is the brute force method I am guessing."

Harry chimed in, "Probably the more painful of the two too."

"Yes, about that. Your pain tolerances are fairly good from what I've seen from your memories... fairly good for a retired veteran Auror. For an eleven year old they are ridiculous."

"And that was before I had these, 'fairly impressive brute force mental protections' as you put it, to hide behind."

"True. I vote for plan B."

"I agree with the headwear, plan B it is."

All of the adults stared at the pair slightly slack-jawed, the healers especially. Those two had just managed to figure out the details of what was going to be said next, on next to no details.

Perenelle decided to break the rather unsettling silence brought on by the strange adolescent and smug hat. "Are you sure about this Harry, Nicolas and I don't know how bad it was at your previous home..."

"It was never home."

This struck the conversation dead again, until the Afro haired healer said, "If it has been decided we can get to performing the ritual immediately, the sooner we get this done, the better."

A half an hour later, laying on a bed in the middle of a circle, the healers told Harry that if he was going to hide behind whatever Occlumency shields he had, he should get going. Dropping into his mediation, and following a minute later into his mindscape, Harry started sealing everything shut, while using a recently taught method by the hat to allow him to be aware in real time.

He had been waiting for five minutes before something struck his outer walls from all directions all at once. He shifted quickly to his front gate, which had taken a solid it. A minute later it was struck again. Between strikes, Harry let go of his hold on real time, as he needed a bit more time to work.

The metal that made up the doors was something the hat had called mythrill, a bright blue-silver metal, and it was one of the most resilient metals known to magic. He focused on the structure of the metal, seeing the alignment of the crystals and strands in it, and then he mentally twisted them, made them tighter and denser. Now it was nearly as reflective as a mirror, and was a vivid electric blue.

The wood, a lusterless gray colored material, that comprised the massive gates and doors was called ironwood, and took centuries to grow to any useable size in the real world. Once more he visualized the structure of the material, focusing on it until he could almost reach out and manipulate the fibers of it with his bare hands. And then he did, he tightened the weave of the threads, and packed the layers more densely. Now the wood had become as white as new driven snow, and almost seemed to glow.

He then demolished the simple set of doors he had, and created a complex monstrosity in their wake. The outer most gate was like a draw bridge, and when closed, it lay flat against the wall for more than a yard in all directions, and protruded into the gate house for at least two feet. It locked into the walls themselves in thirteen separate places. The second gate was a pair of outward opening doors, each of which locked into the walls seven times each, and then into each other a total of seven times. When shut three massive bars, wood with metal reinforcing bands, would seal it further. The last gate was identical to the first, only it opened down onto the inside of the walls.

For when they were sealed, Harry created a liquid that would cause any force that worked to move the gates to be more efficiently forced upon the next gate in line, and upon the walls of the gate house. He was fairly certain he had made the gates even stronger than the walls were.

He sped things back up to real time. For another three minutes, the pain kept ramming into his defenses, coming back more quickly, and staying longer. He then started to notice that the dome had a few stress markers, and a few of the stones of the wall had shifted. He was hit one more time as he slowed it down, so instead of speeding his perception of time back to normal, he tripled the thickness of the dome, making the stress points less of an issue for the moment, and pushed it outwards, clearing the walls by four yards in all directions.

He repaired the wall with a thought, having already increased the thickness of the curtain wall to twenty-one feet to accommodate the new gates. He then broke it down into thirteen separate walls, one against another, each wall forty-nine bricks tall. He then took the obdurite of the bricks and tripled its density with a thought, packing more of it into each square inch. The flat gray stones turned instantly into a light devouring black. While recreating the wall, he feathered it out in six places, forcing it into the appearance of the how the new gate would appear when disguised as wall, each one equidistant from it to the next, starting and ending at the gate.

In the place of the dome, he started creating a series of geodesic domes. Each comprised solely of triangles, each rotated one seventh of the way to lining up with the next triangle in the pattern. Between each layer he filled the space with energy, energy to both separate the layers, and bind them together, to transfer the energy from one to the next, but also disperse it. Seven layered domes he created, and when finished, no longer was it mostly transparent. It pulsed with what could only be called a prismatic energy.

He willed his perception of time back into lock-step with the outside world, and watched as the last remnant of his first defenses were sacrificed, and when the pain fell back upon his new walls, it ground to a screeching halt. It could find no purchase, make no headway. It threw itself upon his mind and could do nothing.

He sat down with the library of his memories and waited. He waited until sleep claimed him.

A/N2: Yes, I am being anvilicious with the fact that things that are not human, are not human. And nor should they be TREATED as human.

And anyone who does not like the term 'logic shaped object' can go copulate with themselves. Vigorously.

A/N: Reviewers. My thanks. They have them.

Now, details, details, details. Something never explicitly mentioned, or that I never noticed, is when exactly the school year ends. I have heard some of fandom say the year is ten months long, others that it is nine. I'm going to say that it starts on the obviousness of September 1st's Opening Feast, and runs until May 31st's Leaving Feast, with the students leaving the next day, on June 1st.

Now as for the two separate holidays, and the three terms. Winter hols run from December 22nd (or the preceding day if that falls upon a Sunday) until January 1st (or the following day if that falls upon a Saturday). That makes the first term run from September 2nd to December 21st. The second term starts on January 2nd and runs until March 21st. Spring hols last from the 22nd to the March 31st, once again taking into account how the weekends work. The third term starts on April first and runs until May 31st. This gives the first term 111 days, making it the longest. Second term runs 79 days, and the last for only 61.

The devil truly is in the details, and I had to exorcize it. Plus my attention tends to lock onto things that interest me, and won't let go until it gets bored. You are all lucky that this story doesn't stop here for a while and pickup in the middle someplace. (8/20/10 - 8/21/10)

Chapter 11: After a Nap, or Ten

The very first thing Harry was aware of when he woke up was pain. It felt vaguely like that time Dudley had pushed him down the stairs and then trodden on him. He then really woke up, and he felt like he was pain, molded rather roughly into a human shape. After groaning rather loudly in pain for about a minute, Harry felt someone pour something down his throat. Maybe it was poison and would put him out of his misery.

Nope, it just made the pain go away. Mostly. He could work with that. He cracked an eye lid open and saw, in order, some random person in Healer's robes, Perenelle, and Alistair. He grumbled incoherently for a few minutes, cracked the other eye open and saw Nicolas and what looked like a room partition in the form of a curtain.

As the pain ebbed further away, he hauled himself into something vaguely resembling a sitting position, and the unknown Healer

scurried off, and he said, "Did anyone get the number of that train that ran me over?"

Alistair chuckled and said, "You're the one that agreed with me and said the quick and brutal way was better. By the way, you've been down for almost seventy two hours."

Harry grunted at that, and then poked his abdomen with his finger. "What have they got to eat in this place?"

Nicolas shook his head mirth at that, Perenelle rolled her eyes, and Alistair chuckled again. Harry had the vague thought of getting him to trademark those. They could be worth a fortune.

"We'll see what the Healer has to say when she gets here. For now, just try not to push yourself. "

All he did in response was grunt.

Nicolas smirked and said, "Well if you can promise to stay in bed, I think there are a pair of people you'd like to meet."

Blinking and looking at the man like he was crazy, Harry shrugged, and leaned back into the bed.

Standing, and with an overly florid bow, Nicolas grandly said, "Then if I may present, fresh from a ten year long performance at Azkaban, Sirius Black, and accompanying, his good friend, and a good friend of James Potter, Remus Lupin." And he drew back the curtain to reveal two men, one on another bed, the other sitting in a chair next to it. They were both grinning like fools and their eyes were lit with mirth.

The one on the bed looked like Harry had felt sometimes at the Dursleys, starved and battered; he had long black hair that was only half way recovered from whatever disaster it had met.

The other man could only be described as looking careworn. His brown hair was flecked with gray, and his face was creased with worry. His clothes were rather shabby.

Harry, in no mood for amusement, grunted, and bluntly said, "So which are you amused at, the grandstanding, or the fact you get to meet me?"

The two shared a long look, and said, in unison, "Both!"

Harry smacked himself in the forehead with both palms, he also couldn't help but grin at this pair of fools, "I thought you were supposed to be in Azkaban. How did they, whoever they are, get you out so quick?"

This time it was Sirius's turn to grunt, "The DMLE, as soon as they got a copy of your parents' will, and references to exactly which laws made Pettigrew a rat, well, they fast tracked the case to trial, declared Peter guilty in absentia, with a penalty of death as soon as he is captured. When that was handled, there was no choice but for them to give me the trial I never had, and under truth potion, was found innocent. That was this morning. So when your guardians heard I was being brought into St. Mungo's for observation to see whether or not I was healthy and sane enough to return to polite society, they somehow managed to get me into the second bed in this room."

Remus took this a cue to explain why he was here, "And when Sirius's owl that said he was sharing a room with James's long lost son came, I couldn't help but come for a visit."

Harry looked at each of them, and then said, "Hrmph. Okay then, how did you two know my dad?"

Sirius's eyes lit up with glee, "The three of us had been inseparable since first year in Hogwarts."

Tying a few threads of logic together, Harry couldn't help but ask, "So which of you two and Pettigrew were Moony, Padfoot, and Wormtail?"

Harry had half anticipated the looks of shock he got, but he couldn't understand the awe that was tinged in it.

Remus was the first to regain the capacity for speech, "How do you know those names?"

Harry jerked a thumb at Alistair, and said, "That tatty guy there pointed me in the direction of the current holders of the Marauder's Map, and he also pointed out the phrase that would activate what seemed more or less a 'legacy' mode."

They were once again stuck dumb and could only seem to stare at the hat. Harry decided to try to get them talking again, "Hey, for a pair of legendary pranksters, you seem to be speechless a little too often for my liking. So fess up, who is who?"

Sirius tossed a pillow at Harry, who grabbed it from midair and threw it back at him, and hit him in face. Remus with grunt of a laugh said, "I'm Moony, pillow-face there is Padfoot and..."

Harry finished darkly, "Wormtail is a fitting name for a traitor."

Healer Tonks choose that particular moment to walk in the door, and she came over to Harry's bed and cast spells for about five minutes before she was satisfied with whatever she was checking, and said, "Okay, we are going to start the process to get you discharged, but when you get home, I don't want you getting out of bed until Friday, and then I don't want you doing anything more strenuous than walking around the house until Saturday, maybe Sunday. You should be all set to resume classes at Hogwarts on Monday."

As she turned to leave the room, Sirius shouted, "Hey Andy, nothing to say to your favorite cousin?"

She whirled on the spot, with a look of surprise on her face, "Siri? I heard you were getting a trial, but I thought it wouldn't be for a while... I have a lot on my plate right now, but make sure you write me. With Bella having had an actual trial and having confessed, and Cissy's husband being a... Malfoy, I don't have an over abundance of family."

"Sure thing Andy, we'll have to get together for dinner or something soon."

"I'd like that Siri." She then left the room.

Harry had decided to take a nap. He had had no interest in that conversation.

Harry was released from the hospital an hour and a half later, and the trip home seemed to take what little energy he had. They managed to get some potions and food in him before he curled up in bed and passed out. Thursday was spent reading in bed, Harry having deduced, with agreement from Alistair, nothing strenuous meant a complete break from Occlumency. He kept reading, and finished children's version of Beedle's Tales. He had taken a large number of naps. Sometime around when he had lunch Nicolas came in with three more books that he recommended Harry read. Two were both simply titled, 'The Hogwarts Charter and Its Amendments' and 'The Rules of the Inter-House Quidditch Cup', and the third was called 'Seeker's Secrets'.

Glancing at Alistair, who was occupying his space hanging from the headboard, Harry asked, "I understand the two Quidditch books, but what's with the book on the Hogwarts Charter?"

"The thing with it is that it is highly recommended reading. Trust both me and Nicolas. There could be a day when that book saves your life in the castle."

Harry grunted at this, and then, not really feeling like reading, and with his eyes growing a little heavy decided to take another nap.

He read a bit of the charter that day, but mostly focused on the Quidditch books and the undiluted Tales of Beedle the Bard. The charter was really, really dry reading. The good news was that his new trunk had arrived that day.

Harry continued to sleep more than usual on the next day, when Perenelle nudged him awake, and then proceeded to drag him to the breakfast table. Harry remained quiet, wanting to take his potion, eat his breakfast, and get some more sleep. Neither adult really wanted to push the youth, so they let him drag himself through the meal and then go back to sleep.

A few hours later, Harry decided that since he was allowed some mobility, he would at least go out and read in the late summer sunlight. Dropping to the ground by the door with his four books, he idly leafed through them, working his way through all of them, the charter still getting the least attention. After lunch, he decided to take up occupancy in one of the chairs in the library and spent the rest of the day, including a short nap, there. After dinner he went to his

room, and spent the short time between then and when he decided he would go to sleep for the night, finishing up reading the rules about the inter-house Quidditch cup.

On Saturday, he work feeling quite a bit better than the other days, but still a bit knackered, and so he stuck to what he had done on Friday. He finished up both the book on Seeker tips, and the other Beedle book, and had finally started to wrap his mind around the Book on the Charter. He was just about to start the second on Wards of Hogwarts, when he decided to turn in for the night.

The next morning, he woke up almost at his normal time, and felt absolutely fine, so he decided to ask Al if he felt like helping him with his Occlumency. The Hat, though nowhere near bored yet, decided to see what havoc had been wrought on the young man's defenses.

However he was not prepared for the reforged defenses. He was struck speechless as Harry picked their way through the new gatehouse and into the mindscape proper. Alistair had only one thing to say, "How the bloody hell, did you manage to improve your defenses this much? These are some of the most impressive I've seen since Salazar, and he invented modern Occlumency!"

"They say necessity is the mother of invention, and I say its father is duress. The pain had battered my gate down to its last locks in two hits, and after rebuilding the gate, the walls and dome didn't last much longer."

"Harry, I feel bad for anyone that takes a run at your defenses once I finish teaching you. But have you finished populating your misdirection?"

"Mostly, I have to redo whatever spaces I have in the outer wall, and link them to the dummy chambers. And now that I think about, I should probably redo everything in the library with the new materials."

"Then you should see about that, and don't forget you have to go through the memories since the last time you did it, a week ago Saturday."

Leaving his mind for a moment to put Al back on his spot on the headboard, he then went back into his mind, and started sorting

through his memories, working his way back to the previous Saturday, and he found each memory to be crystal clear. And he could recall them with an ease with frightened him. And when he reached the last place he had went through his memories he couldn't help but feel there were more, earlier memories he hadn't gone through.

He leaped out of his mindscape, and rounded on Alistair, "I didn't care about what was blocking me apart from wanting it gone, but something is different!"

"Calm down, Harry, and explain."

He did, and the Hat replied that he had also had the lack of foresight to not ask about the details of the blocks. He then offered to be with Harry when he went through the new memories from his past. Part of him wanted to never touch the new, old memories, and a part of him felt the need to get it over with, and a few of the voices decided to try and get their own say in, before Harry decided he would do it, and he would have Alistair there with him.

Going back into his mind, Harry went through the newly recalled memories, some of them were meaningless, him cooking meals, a few were horrific, the memory of his sixth birthday when Vernon had decided he was old enough to start doing the lion's share of the cooking, and the burns and broken bones that failure had resulted in. Most ran the middle ground of his life at the Dursleys, mildly horrible.

There were a few spots that felt like there should be memories but weren't there. Alistair said they were probably where he had been memory charmed, and he would eventually teach Harry how to get around them, but that was not to be anywhere in the near future.

But then he reached the memories of before Halloween 1981. He could remember his mother singing to him, his father taking him for a ride on a broom, playing with Padfoot, in both his forms, and being bounced on his Uncle Moony's knee. Aunt Pen playing with his toes, Uncle Nic giving him a stuffed snitch. Memories that he should have been too young to recall, and Alistair agreed with him. He was in no shape to renovate the other parts of his mind.

When Nicolas came to get him for breakfast, he found Harry curled up with his back against the headboard, knees drawn to his chest,

arms wrapped around his legs, and head bowed down as far as it could go. He sat down on the bed near Harry, and just put a hand on his shoulder.

It was Alistair that spoke first, "Whatever blocks or seals were on his mind, degraded his conscious ability to both record and recall his memories. It however did not stop the full and complete ability he has to remember everything. His memories are crystal clear. He has an eidetic memory."

And then Harry added in, with a broken voice, "And I can remember up until shortly before my first birthday."

And with that said Nicolas watched as Harry waged a war with his emotions to get them back under his command. He shook like a leaf in the wind, gasped as if in pain. It was vicious, brutal, and short. The only evidence that he had come a hair's breadth from a complete mental breakdown was flushed skin and tear tracks down his face.

"Go get washed up for breakfast." Nicolas then left to tell this turn of events to Perenelle.

Harry followed to breakfast four minutes later.

The two adults just watched as Harry took his potion and dug into the meal.

Perenelle was the first to speak, "Harry are you sure..."

"That what I remember is real? You, Auntie Pen, really liked playing with my toes for some reason, and Uncle Nic gave me a stuffed snitch for my first birthday. So, did it happen?"

Both of them could only nod mutely, and Harry started to shake and cry as he thought about the fact that he could now remember what his parents looked like, what they sounded like. The fact that they... He killed that thought before it could hurt him. And while he was fighting a war with himself, Pen had gotten up and drawn him into a hug.

Harry sobbed once, before regaining control. He didn't think about how it felt to have someone hugging him who cared, and he brutally

slaughtered the growing thought of how it had felt like when his mother had held him.

He weakly said, and tried to make himself believe, "I'm okay. I'm fine."

Perenelle tousled his hair, smiled at him, and went back to her seat.

Deciding to forge on ahead, Nicolas said, "If you feel up to it, Sirius and Remus have offered to take us to lunch in Diagon Alley. We need to stop by Ollivander's and see if your wand is still attuned to you. With the number of blocks you had, the Healers thought that it was entirely possible that it was a false match, or even a forced match."

Bringing his face up, he said something he had shared with no one, "My wand shares a core with Voldemort's."

"So if you do indeed need a different wand, than Dumbledore was probably playing one of his games and forced it."

"I need to get out of the house, even if it is for a little while. Starting to feel a little stir-crazy."

"Well head out at eleven then. Don't forget to bring your potion."

When they walked into the restaurant, and he saw Sirius and Remus, before he even knew what he was thinking, or even doing, he had launched himself into Sirius, and hugged the man for dear life, all while half-sobbing the word 'Padfoot'.

After Harry, having embarrassed himself, got his emotions back under control, he, Nicolas, and Perenelle told the last two Marauders what had happened with Harry's memory. When they tried to question whether or not it was possible, Harry shut them up by saying Sirius could turn into a massive black dog.

After a decent lunch, in which Harry avoided losing further control of himself, Remus and Sirius decided they were going to accompany Harry to Ollivander's.

Walking into the shop, the rather creepy old wandmaker said, "Ah, Mr. Potter, I hadn't expected you back for a long while yet, is there a problem with your wand?"

"I apparently had a number of... blocks, on my magic, and the Healers..."

"Recommended you see if your wand was still compatible. Of course, it is quite easy to check. Just hold out your wand."

Harry held out his wand, and the wandmaker cast some sort of wandless spell. He scowled and cast it again. "Apparently the Healers were entirely too correct. I am not even getting a mild reaction between you and the wand. I guess we'll have to start from the beginning. You're still right handed?"

And then what followed was a repeat of Harry's first visit to the shop, except it took even longer, though the wandmaker seemed to get more and more excited, until finally Ollivander disappeared into the back of the shop and came out reverently bearing a small chest.

"Inside this, Mr. Potter are my masterpieces. The wands in here are unlike any others I have created, and each is unique amongst its peers. Here black fir and white ash, ten inches, with the crest feather from a gryphon. An excellent wand for combat. No, nope. Here, redwood with thestral and pegasus tail hairs, eleven and a half inches, perfect for illusion work."

They went through the rest of the wands in the box, one by one, each made up of either rare or esoteric combinations until the last one.

"And this Mr. Potter, is the finest of them all. In the deepest forests of the Continent there is a species of magical tree, its bark shaped like flames, its leaves like wings, its sap is some of the most combustible material known to magic, but the tree itself is fireproof. They call it dragonwood, and are not its alternating grains of black and red beautiful? And this is the only sample I've ever gotten that would make a wand. Its core is made up of three entwined dragon heartstrings. One was from a particularly nasty Hungarian Horntail, it had to have been put down for the damage it constantly caused. Another came from a Ukrainian Ironbelly, a particularly massive one at that. It died during a mating season. The last... the last. During an

archeological dig, a group of curse breakers found a perfectly preserved corpse of a Roman Black. The muggles blame Nero for burning Rome when it really was one of these fellows. They are extinct now. That item is what marked the creation of this wand... I wanted to see what I could make by pushing myself. Thirteen inches, exactly. No strengths, no weakness, outside of being more powerful, by far, than any other wand I have made. Give it a wave."

Picking up the wand, Harry felt warmth and energy rush down his arm and into his chest. He had been starting to feel a little spent from being out and about, but now he felt better, if only slightly. The only visible sign that the wand reacted was a pulse of emerald green, bright gold, and fiery red energy around his hand.

"The one thing I truly worried about Mr. Potter, is that I would never find the person this wand belonged to. Thank you." With that said, the old man handed Harry a small book entitled 'Wand Care', a box that had 'wand care supplies' written on it, and a forearm holster. "Take good care of it Mr. Potter. And it will take good care of you."

As the group was just about to walk out of the store, and it would only be later when he was going through the day's events that Harry would note that Ollivander didn't ask for payment, another pair of people walked in. One was an old woman who had a vulture on top of her hat, and the other Harry recognized quite easily.

"Hiya, Neville."

"Hey, Harry. You look like something that cat's been at. Gran, I'd like to introduce you to Harry Potter. Harry, I'd like to introduce to my Grandmother, Augusta Longbottom."

"It's a pleasure to meet you ma'am."

The old woman smiled and shook Harry's hand, and said, "So you're the one who has managed to put some backbone in my grandson, if only by association. The Longbottoms and Potters have been friends and allies for over ten generations, and it is so nice to see it continue."

"Thank you, ma'am, I need to get going, I've only been out of bed for a day and a half and would like to get home to rest a little before going back to Hogwarts."

"Of course, of course. Have a pleasant day."

"You too, ma'am."

Exiting the shop, Sirius promised Harry that he would write, while Remus grinned like he knew the punch line to some joke, and they went their separate ways, with Harry and the Flamels heading home. He went to his bed, and laid down for a nap.

Awakening and feeling refreshed, Harry decided to get what packing he had to do done. He put the two Beedle the Bard books back in the library where he found them, placed the two Quidditch books and the Charter book in one compartment of his trunk, his potions, save for one dose, in another, and packed his clothes in the third.

Harry then sat down on his bed, and went to work revamping the rest of his defenses, bringing the materials up to date, especially the vault with the memory of his second Halloween. By the time he had made any noticeable headway, he was starting to tire a bit, so he stopped and headed back out, just as Nic was poking his head in. Seeing Harry's open eyes he said, "Let's get you fed, and then we'll see you back to Hogwarts, you've been away for too long."

Nodding, he hauled himself up, feeling particularly hungry.

As they walked up toward the castle, Harry felt in one pocket for his shrunken trunk, which he had been told would return to normal size with a tap of his wand, and in another, the letter he had yet to read from his mother. As he parted from Nicolas and Perenelle, getting a hug from each, he wondered what was written in the letter, and why his father hadn't written one.

Making his way to the Tower, he didn't even pay attention to his surrounds, somehow finding his way with unconscious ease. Climbing through the portrait hole, he heard all sound stop, it was still fairly early on a Sunday, and as he had been out like a light last Sunday in St. Mungo's, he really had had no idea what to expect. Somebody shouted, "Where've you been Potter?" to which his simple reply was, "Ill." He then made his way to the dorm, and put his shrunken chest and letter on his bedside table and lay down. It had been a long walk.

Neville bounded into the room, with a goofy grin on his face, and greeted Harry, "Still looking a bit under the weather Harry, you going to go to bed for the night, or just have a bit of a lay down?"

"Probably just a bit of a nap."

"Okay, Hermione and I have the notes and assignments for last week's classes, so I'll see if I can find her and get those from her."

"Thanks, did you two volunteer or...?"

"Volunteered when McGonagall asked for someone."

"Thanks."

"No problem, Harry."

With that, Neville went down into the common room to look for Hermione and Harry stretched out after getting his boots off, and nodded off.

A/N2: I wanted to make Harry's wand truly unique, and even give it a story all its own. Those of you who don't particularly care, well tough. As for those concerned that The Tales of Beedle the Bard will lead the hollows, don't be. I picked the only bit of canon lore that would give me fictitious stories and decided to play with it a little.

A/N: Once more, and as always, a great big thank you to the reviewers for their feedback. (Now taking unsigned reviews. If I start getting the more unsavory elements of the internet in there, It will go back to being disabled.)

For all the people who have noticed my May 31st / July 1st flub, I meant June. I get the two months confused REALLY easily. They both start with the same two letters, and one follows the other. I fixed chapter 11 so it reads the right (June) month. Sorry.

And whatever differences between the schedules I give and what exists in canon can be attributed to two things. General AU-ness and the fact that except when I am going hunting for details as I write this, it has been about two years since I have read the books.

More schedule stuff! Quidditch to be precise. Each Team apparently plays each other team once, competing for what appears to be total number of points scored. So therefore there are six games played each year (GvR, GvH, GvS, RvH, RvS, and HvS). Consider that games are probably not played in the first month due to the need for everyone to practice, or the last month due to exams, so there are a total of seven months to schedule six games. Figure first is in late October, second mid January, and third in early December. The games then break until the fourth in late February, the fifth in mid March, with the last game being played in early April. What order the games occur in is picked out of a hat by Hooch each year.

Part of me is crying out to go back through everything change every mention of the Hufflepuff house mascot to a wolf, and place a note of extreme AU-ness on the first chapter A/N that I changed that. I can draw parallels between each houses' mascot and their qualities except for badgers and Hufflepuff. I don't see any kind of work ethic in the badger as an animal, and there are far too many other animals that exhibit more apparent pack or collective behavior. I think I may have the subject of my first poll. I need to think on this. (8/21/10)

Chapter 12: The Recovery Week

Harry groaned slightly, and hauled himself off of his bed. He felt a bit better, but he could tell he would be going to bed early tonight. Pulling his boots back on and shrugging his way back into a school robe, he made his way down to the common room.

He found Neville and Hermione ensconced in a pair of chairs near one of the windows. Plopping himself down on the ground near them, he sat cross-legged. He then said, "Neville said you two took notes for me and kept track of the assignments I'd have to do?"

Hermione handed him a sheaf of parchments, and asked in a horrified voice, "So what happened that made you miss school for a week?"

Harry didn't even say anything to this, but simply quirked an eyebrow.

Hermione got the hint, and spoke in a subdued voice, "It has to with September the First and you'll tell us when you feel like it, and not a moment sooner?"

Harry decided to try and put a curb on this incessant curiosity of hers and said, while leafing through the notes he just got, "Yup. Everyone has a right to privacy Hermione. How would you feel if I asked you how many times you went to the loo today, or if you have any birthmarks in embarrassing places?"

She turned bright red, and simply stated, "I wouldn't like it."

"The things I am keeping quiet about aren't embarrassing in the sense that those questions are. But... they... hurt. It hurts in a way I am not used to..." He trailed off at this point, leaving the unsaid, but well understood message to his two companions, that he is used to hurting, and is quite capable of dealing with it.

They settled into silence for a short while, Neville and Hermione working on homework, and Harry reading the notes. Seeing how quickly he was going through the notes, Hermione decided on a change of subject, "Are you even reading the notes, Harry?"

"Huh? Yeah... of course I am. What makes you think that I'm not?"

Neville decided that he would field that question, "Because you are going through each classes' notes about every three minutes, and Hermione takes detailed notes, in tiny writing."

Harry grimaced at this, "Trust me, it will all make sense at one point. Just not now." He leafed through the last few pages of notes, and then looked at the list of work he would have to do. He then started going through the notes again, just to be safe.

They finished up what they were working on just as he set the list of notes aside. They watched as he leaned his head back against the wall, and closed his eyes. Hermione whispered, "Do you think we should just tell him to go to bed?"

Neville shook his head, "No, I don't think he is trying to sleep. If I remember my lessons right, I think he is meditating, which could actually explain quite a bit."

Hermione quirked an eyebrow and put a questioning look on her face.

"Most pureblood families teach their children at one point in time the Mind Art of Occlumency. It protects the mind from invasion, while increasing one's ability to recall information. But before you ask, no, I can't teach it to you, I am absolutely pants at it."

"But that doesn't seem fair..."

"Hermione, from what I was taught, anything beyond the most basic uses of Occlumency is not only extremely difficult to learn, it is difficult to teach. If he gets as much use out of it as I am starting to think he does, it is an exceptionally rare talent that takes time and effort to develop. And before you ask him, he probably isn't in any sort of state where he can try and teach it to you. I would suggest you check out any books on the subject in the library. And don't bug him about it."

Hermione harrumphed at that, and asked, "Why does he have to be such a mystery? I don't think he is even trying to be, it just comes naturally to him. Mysteries bug me, I can't see one without trying to solve it."

Neville finished packing his things away, ignoring her question, got himself up, and went to see if Dean and Seamus wanted to play a game of exploding snap. Hermione pulled out a book titled 'A Record of the Events of Hogwarts, 52nd revision' and started to read.

She occasionally stole a glance at Harry, and the only movement she saw from him was a flicker of his eyelids.

Five minutes later, Harry opens his eyes, hauls himself off the floor, and goes up to the dorm to go do the work he has to get done. Hopefully he can manage to get it done before each class it is due in came around, but first he had to pack his new trunk.

Over the next week, Harry managed to get caught up with relative ease, though they finally did get a Professor for DADA on Monday. He introduced himself as Auror Kingsley Shacklebolt, and stated that he was on loan to the school for the year from the DMLE due to facts he was not allowed to talk about. He had managed to rope one of the seventh year Hufflepuffs into being his teaching assistant. Though at first it sounded like he called her a target dummy. This poor soul's name was Nymphadora Tonks, and she stunned anyone and everyone who tried to call her by her first name, and anyone what laughed at her pink hair. Harry decided not to give her any excuses to make him practice his well-honed dodging skills.

History of Magic also stopped being a near mandatory nap time. It was announced at breakfast Tuesday, and the cheering in the Great Hall was mixed, and in a way it was unsettling. Both Gryffindor and Slytherin remained silent. Both houses apparently enjoyed their naps far too much. The Ravensclaws rejoiced as a whole, and the Badgers were divided. The new teacher remained unIntroduced.

However Harry arrived early for the class, a few minutes before the previous class let out. He closed his eyes and rested for a few minutes. He really wished that the class was still naptime. He was absolutely knackered. He opened his eyes as the other class cleared out. He waited another minute, and went in, and was surprised by the familiar face that greeted him.

"Uncle Moony?"

The worn looking man corrected, "That's Professor Lupin while in class Mr. Potter..." However the grin that split his face how showed that it wasn't class time, yet. "You're looking beat, cub. Still haven't finished recovering from what happened last week?"

Harry covered his mouth as a yawn caused his jaw to creak, and replied, "No, I still get tired too easily. Please tell me that you aren't going to do anything drastic this class?"

"No, no, we'll just be having a discussion on who actually remembers what Binns was droning on about for the past two weeks. So it shouldn't be too hard for you to stay awake."

Harry took a seat in the first row of chairs, and idly leafed through his history text, waiting for the class to start.

The next day everyone generally agreed that Professor Lupin was a far superior teacher than Binns.

He was however a little anxious when a flier for tryouts for the only open positions, seeker and one chaser position, on the house team went up for Friday after dinner. He still spent a lot of time resting. He continued to tired fairly easily, and it was beginning to irritate him. Throughout the week, Harry read the book on wand care he was given. The very first sentence in the book was, 'Do not keep your wand in a back pocket unless you desire to lose a buttock.' Harry had yet to actually use the forearm holster he had, because quite frankly it didn't look big enough.

The he remembered that both his backpack and his trunk were larger on the inside than the outside, and he hit himself on the forehead for this lapse in attention.

He got progressively more nervous as the tryouts approached, though neither Neville nor Hermione knew that he was going to try out. Harry had already cornered the fifth year who was Captain, one Oliver Wood, who merely nodded with a feral grin when Harry pointed out that there were no actual rules against first years trying out for and playing on House Quidditch teams. It was only against bringing their own brooms.

He did however inform Fred and George what he was doing, and when he managed to scrape together the time, they helped Harry practice his flying, acting as a pair of human Bludgers.

Then the day of the tryouts came. Harry went down to the pitch right after finishing dinner, and went to the school broomshed. He spent the next hour working his way through each broom, trying to find the

least damaged of the lot, eventually settling on one of the Cleansweeps. Checking his watch, he shouldered the broom and made his way out of the shed, only to be intercepted by Madam Hooch. Taking the broom from Harry and checking it over, she gave him a nod, and handed it back.

The practice was brutal for Harry. He flew against older students on better brooms. But no matter what, he managed to out fly them all. When Wood called an end to the tryouts, Harry landed on the ground, and then dropped to his hands and knees. The Weasley twins were there a few moments later, picking him up off the ground. Oliver was slightly concerned that the best Seeker of the tryouts collapsed right after, until which ever twin was supporting Harry on the left said, "Ollie, he was the best out there, hands down, riding on a piece of shite school broom. While he was still recovering from a three day stay in St. Mungo's!"

And Wood's eyes lit up at the fact that Harry wasn't in top condition when trying out, and he still made the rest of the Seekers look like fools. In fact he even started to drool a little. Ignoring their insane captain, the twin said, "Come on my good twin, let's go pour Harrykins here into bed."

Harry came to a short while later, and muttered something about damn Dumbledore. He wondered slightly who had dumped him into bed before the image of the twins each taking one of his arms over their shoulders appeared in his mind. He quickly thumbed through the list of assignments in his mind, and found that anything he had to do, needed to be done towards the end of next week, so that left Harry with nothing to do, and the fact that it was... he checked his watch... eight at night, didn't help much.

He still felt like he beat with a very large, fairly filthy stick. So he grabbed some of his more leisurely clothes and went to get clean.

Afterwards, he pulled on a school robe, and trudged down to the common room, and went over to where Neville, Dean, and Seamus were playing a game of exploding snap. Harry had joined them for a few games in the first week, and one when he had the time in the past week. So he sat down and waited for this particular game to play out, so he could be dealt in.

Harry slept deeply that night, but not for long. As he sat in bed, trying to figure out what he was going to do until he felt like falling asleep again, he could not think of much, besides the fact that he had stomached as much of the Charter as he could stand for a day. His eyes fell upon his nightstand, wherein he kept the letter from his mother, the letter he hadn't read yet. The letter he didn't know if he could read.

Leaving Alistair on the headboard, Harry checked his watch from where it sat on the nightstand. One thirty in the morning. No sane person would be down in the common room at this hour. He hauled himself out of bed, opened the draw, and grabbed the letter. Stuffing his slippers onto his feet, Harry silently padded his way down to the common room.

Taking a chair near an open window, Harry leaned far back into it. He stared off into space turning the envelope over and over in his hands. He felt that he couldn't do this alone, but he didn't know anyone, Alistair included, that he wanted around to see the breakdown that would come with the reading of this.

And he could feel the breakdown coming. His world had taken hammerblows, his entire life was manipulated by an old man, who destroyed his chance at having a childhood, who had shackled what he was, who had robbed him of memories of his parents...

He stared down at the envelope. But then when his defenses were undergoing a breakdown, they were rebuilt stronger. Maybe what his mother wrote would break him... but what if it made him stronger? Could he stand not knowing? And she left two letters, to be given at specific ages. What if... god forbid... what if there was information about Voldemort in them? Harry doubted he would survive to see his twentieth birthday if he ignored any source of information about that man.

He didn't know what kind of life his parents had wanted for him, but now, now he knew... he knew... He was fighting with himself to get the thought into his mind, when an owl ghosted through the window and landed on his knee. His snowy owl and first friend, Hedwig. He thought it rather strange that the most fulfilling conversations from his life in at the Dursleys' had taken place in his last month there, and the other side had been an owl. He didn't know how, but he had

always seemed to understand what she meant, and when he talked to her, the voices seemed to quiet.

With her company, and comfort, he finished the thought. He now knew, without a doubt that his parents had loved him. But he needed to know what his mother wanted to tell him. He turned the letter over and read the elegantly written 'Harry' on the front of it. He traced the letters with a finger, before opening the envelope and taking the letter out.

My dearest Harry,

If you are reading this, your father and I have died before the war ended with Voldemort. For all I know the war could still be continuing while you are reading this. What I do know is that you should be getting this on, or shortly after, your eleventh birthday. There is so much I wish I could tell you, but all of it boils down to two simple facts. Your father and I love you, and all we want for you in life is to see that you are happy. Though I wish at least one of us would be there to tell you this, that madman is after our family, and everything we do to protect ourselves may not be enough.

That being said, if you are reading this, you are the last of the Potters. Your father has prepared for this, and in the family vault is a journal that will tell you all you need to know. It will either directly tell you, or point you toward where the information you need is. It will tell you all you need to know about Heading the family.

But there is a reason why Voldemort is after us. That he is after you. Shortly before you were born a prophecy was made. Now your father and I are not the type to believe in that sort of trash, but sadly both Voldemort and Dumbledore are. Now I won't be telling you what the prophecy says, at least not yet, because no matter how much I want you to survive, if you destroy what chance you have for happiness when you are this age, I fear you may only become useful for one thing, fighting back the darkest evil, and that is not the type of life we want for you.

What I will tell you is that it refers to either you or one other. Your father and I have been friends with the other's parents since Hogwarts. It is so nice to watch you two play together. If our wishes for guardianship have been followed, he'll probably have either been

your best friend growing up, or something very much akin to a brother. Yes, it's Neville Longbottom.

You will need friends in your life, Harry, so don't close yourself off from the world. But whatever you do, do not trust Dumbledore. He has only seen people as pieces on a chessboard for far too long. He will use you. Remember, your father and I love you. And whatever it takes for you to survive what comes, make sure that you can live with what you become afterwards, and that you can be happy with what you become.

Love,

Your Mum

Harry finished reading the letter and started shaking with silent sobs. His life had been destroyed because two men believed in one person's ravings about what may come to pass. It was not fair. Why did it have to be him? Why couldn't... no, he wouldn't say that. He was incapable of wishing his life upon his worst enemy, so he would not ask why someone else. But it hurt to know that the only contact he would ever have with his parents would be through words on paper.

He sat there crying, for how long he was never sure of. Hedwig shifted on his knee, and but then she made a sound he never heard her make before. The closest he could think he could equate it to was song. The song seemed to surge through him, and filled him with warmth, hope, and calm.

When he looked up, she had changed. In the place of the owl that had been there was a slightly larger bird, but looked far different. Her feathers were still white, but with blue plumage.

Just as Harry's mind was registering the change in his friend two things happened at the same time.

A voice, a distinctly feminine voice, sounded from in his mind, though he could tell it did not originate there, and said, *It is nice to finally be able to drop the act and speak to you, Harry.*

And from the direction of the stairs leading to the boys' dorms, someone said, "Bloody hell. What's a phoenix doing in here?"

A/N2: Anyone who wants Tonks and Harry to run into each other in a meaningful way at this point, it is not going to happen, at least at Hogwarts. Some of my vague plans may keep her around, but she isn't going to be anything resembling a major character for a good long while yet, until at the very least the end of the Tri-Wizard.

No matter what Harry's apparent mental age is to those who know him right now, he looks like an eleven year old boy. And I can think of very few seventeen year-olds that would willingly hang out with eleven year-olds, and the fact that as a seventh year she is going to be hammered by her teachers about NEWTs.

For those curious as to why I used Kingsley for the DADA post instead of making someone up, well I didn't want to make someone up.

As for Moony teaching history, well he is the type to really need a job, McGonagall managed to at least get an Auror to cover DADA for the year, and the History post is most definitely not curse. Snape won't be a jealous git about the werewolf getting the job that he has wanted for years, and therefore is less likely to spill the beans about his furry little problem.

A/N: Thanks to all the reviewers. Now, I won't lie and say that I don't have an idea what romantic relationship I am going to stick Harry in, but that is far enough down the line (books 4 & 5) that it is subject to change. As for Tonks, I have a few ideas about what I am going to use her for, but again, not saying anything.

This is a short one, but hey, I've had a good run of lengthy ones. (circa 8/21/10 - 8/22/10)

"Speech" : 'Thoughts' : *Familiar Speak* (Only heard by Harry)

Chapter 13: The Second Friend

Leaning forward enough in the chair to see just who had come down into the common room, Harry saw none other than Neville. "Good... ungodly hour of the night slash morning, Neville."

Neville just stood there making various grunting noises while he tried to get his mouth to say something.

"Trevor got your tongue, Neville?"

He made a choking sound at this comment and blinked a good half a dozen times.

"I am just going to keep saying more and more insane things until you regain the use of words Neville, so hurry up!"

His face blanked at this, and he started laughing. Shaking his head, he launched himself into a chair near Harry. Knowing Harry well enough to only ask more or less innocent questions, "So why are you sitting down in the common room at this sort of ungodly hour, with a phoenix on your knee?"

"Is that what you are? Is that what she is?"

Hedwig rolled her eyes, fluttered up to the back of the chair, and cuffed Harry upside the head with one of her wings. Neville snorted in amusement and said, "I'd take that as a yes from her, and that is what I think she is. But you didn't answer my question."

"True. It is actually kinda obvious. I couldn't sleep."

"Obviously. So since you couldn't sleep, you decided to come down here. It is probably common enough. But where did the phoenix come in?"

"I was mulling over whether or not I was going to read a letter from my mother that had been held at Gringotts, and then as if knowing I needed the moral support, Hedwig came in through the window." He jerked his thumb at the open window.

"Okay, but where does the phoenix come in, and where did Hedwig go?"

He jerked the thumb at the phoenix perched on the back of the chair, "Right here."

"Wait, I thought Hedwig was an owl."

"So did I!"

Hedwig cuffed him upside the head again. Harry gave her a dirty look, and she just trilled a note of amusement.

Neville blinked in amusement and confusion for a few seconds, and then said, "Do you think she might be an actual familiar?"

Harry said, at the same time Hedwig spoke to Harry, "A what?" *Of course I am.* Which resulted in him turning to look at her.

"You don't know what a familiar is Harry? Everyone raised in our world knows what a familiar is."

Harry took a breath and looked out the window, his face than contorted in pain and he said, "Neville, what I tell you can go no further than the three of us. I think talking about... what I want to talk about may help, but I need your word you won't tell a soul."

"Potters and Longbottoms have been keeping each other's secrets for ten generations, we should both know this as the heirs of our houses. Of course I'll keep your secrets Harry."

"Except I don't know that. I was raised by my Aunt and Uncle, my mundane Aunt and Uncle... and it was not a good childhood." Harry then launched into a retelling of the past three weeks, about

everything except the letter. It was a good forty-five minutes later when he stopped. Neville sat there looking shocked in some places, angry in others, and happy for his friend when appropriate.

"That explains a lot Harry. Except for Hedwig the phoenix."

*Oh that, Albus did everything in his power to block or limit your familiar bonds, Harry."

Harry's head whipped around to Hedwig and he said, "That miserable old man!" He looked back at Neville for all of half a second before his head was pulled back toward Hedwig, "Did you say bonds, as in plural?" She just nodded.

"I am assuming Dumbledore mucked with your familiar bonds?" Harry nodded. "What was that old coot thinking? Even in the most common books on familiar lore include sections on the repercussions of blocked bonds."

"Why did you read books on familiar lore, Nev?"

"Because I hoped for all my childhood that I would have one, but given the fact that most of my family thought that I was a squib for the longest time, they really didn't go out of the way to teach me much magic, so I had lots of free time to pursue what I found interesting. So I assume you want to get a crash course in familiars?"

All Harry did was nod.

"Okay, the difference between actual familiars and the pets that most witches and wizards call familiars is that in the case of the former, they are always magical creatures of some kind. The pets are mostly magically fortified rats, toads, and owls, and part-kneazles, none of which can be actual familiars. Pure-bred kneazles yes, but part-breeds no. The bond between the witch or wizard and the familiar is symbiotic in nature. In blocked bonds, the witch or wizard often starts to hear voices. The reason why this happens is still debated, but the current consensus is that magic increases mental activity to a certain degree, and needs an outlet. This has some bit of proof in that actual familiars tend to only appear with very powerful wizards, generally those that pop up once every fifty or so years. The rarer cases of multiple familiars tend to belong to

stupidly powerful wizards that only appear every couple hundred years... And now that I think about it, those voices you mentioned were probably a result of Dumbledore's meddling. Congratulations, you are slightly less insane than you thought you were!"

"Thanks Nev."

"Not a problem, does Hedwig know how many familiar bonds could form off of you?"

Harry turned to the phoenix and scowled.

"She said, and I quote, 'that would be telling!'"

Neville fell off of his chair in a fit of laughter.

Harry smiled at his... friend, his second friend. That lit a warm little fire in his chest, and he didn't move to shut down the feeling. But he put a serious face back on, and when Neville saw it, he stopped laughing and got back up into the chair, and he then asked, "There's something more you want to tell me?"

Harry nodded, "In my mum's letter, she mentions the reason my family was attacked... sometime before my birth, a prophecy was made..."

Neville interrupted, "But the most common schools of thought on those say they only have power if they are given it."

"Exactly. She said only two people believed in it, but with those two being Dumbledore and Voldemort..."

"More than enough power."

Harry nodded again, and pressed on, "She said there was another that the prophecy could have meant, that it could have also meant the son of her best friend..."

"My mum. I remember my Gran talking Sunday when she was bringing me back to Hogwarts that your mum was my godmother, and my mum was yours."

Harry nodded at this, and continued on, "I can only think of one reason that both of them would get tunnel vision on this prophecy. It has to relate somehow with the permanent defeat of Voldemort."

The two sat in silence for almost ten minutes.

Harry broke it, "So if it is going to have to be one of us..."

Neville grimly smiled, "It might as well be both of us."

"My mum had one bit of advice for me. She more or less said that I shouldn't stop living my life because of this. And I think neither of us should. And, since I highly doubt Dumbledore is one to put all of his eggs in one basket, you should at least talk to your Gran about the prophecy, tell her about the old man's meddling in my life..."

"And get myself checked for blocks?"

"Yes. But you need to do it face to face. Being a Ward of Hogwarts offers me a rather insane amount of protection from the Headmaster, almost like it was created to protect students from Heads playing god. I think we both need to talk to Alistair, and soon."

"Sure."

They both got up, and Hedwig hopped onto Harry's shoulder. "Hey, Nev, you want to prank Malfoy and the Slytherin Weasley at some point soon? They've tried one time too many to sabotage my potions."

"Sure, I've got nothing better to do tomorrow..."

The two made their way to their rest.

A/N2: Everyone loves a double take. Now to fit in a spit take...

A/N: I would like to give, once more, my appreciation to my reviewers. This'll most likely be the only chapter today. AU-ness note: The mention of the first Gryffindor game in the books is after Halloween. From my recollection, the book does not mention when any of the games take place, aside from Gryffindor. A butterfly flapping its wings (or Dumbles getting grounded and various other factors in this case) moved the game. This represents my first major time skip. (8/22/10)

Chapter 14: Time Passes

The next day, Harry and Neville did indeed have a chat with Alistair. The end result of that conversation was that if after the Winter Holidays if it was found that Neville had had any blocks placed on him, the Hat would immediately have him made a Ward of Hogwarts. They also planned a bit of payback directed at Malfoy and Ronald, who worked against each other as much as they, individually, worked against Gryffindor.

So instead of doing anything thing that would point to action taken from outside the House of Snakes, they used a number of carefully placed jinxes and hexes, most of which Harry had learned from the Twins, to turn the pair of Slytherins, along with the rest of the house's first years, against themselves. All it really took was a trio of trip jinxes, a pair of boil hexes, and a particularly nasty slug-belching hex.

The house then devolved into a state of prank warfare. It lasted for weeks, costing the Snakes whatever points that Professor Snape managed to sneak past his oaths. It was the middle of October, about a week before the first Quidditch match of the year, Gryffindor vs. Slytherin, before it ended. The new Head of Slytherin, Aurora Sinistra, finally stepped in, and handed out a week of detention to each and every first year Snake.

The twins, in awe of Neville's work with Harry, started worked alongside him whenever they pulled Harry into a prank.

A great many people in the castle wondered why a white phoenix had taken to following Harry around, often riding on his shoulder. When Harry and Neville both acted like nothing was out of the

ordinary, and pointedly ignored questions, everyone at least shut up about it. To their faces. They both had made it a point in the first month to remain willfully ignorant of the Hogwarts rumor mill. Their sanity had required it.

Though when Hermione asked, she got a 'we'll tell you, sooner rather than later, if you respect Harry's privacy'. Which caused her to not talk to either of them for a week, because she correctly deduced that Neville knew. She apologized to them however, and then Harry went into a short speech on his belief about forgiveness.

"Well I am not going to forgive you. Forgiveness is permission to repeat behavior. I am however willing to forget it."

Snape however tried to give Harry a detention and dock points. He took it to McGonagall, and with the two present, recited articles, sections, and paragraphs from the Hogwarts Charter that explained exactly why he was allowed to have his bonded familiar accompany him anywhere he went in the castle.

While they had the Slytherin prank war for their viewing entertainment, Harry and Neville, alongside Hermione, became some of the best students of their year. Harry took the top spot with ease, outpacing Hermione with an ease that visibly annoyed the witch. Sure she took the second spot, but it became apparent that she was a sore loser. Harry ignored it, and didn't change how he acted to his favorite study buddy. He figured she would get used to being second best.

Neville, with the two of them to help him, wasn't a definitive third, but he was indeed somewhere in the top thirteen. His spellwork improved dramatically after having gotten a new wand, and sitting directly next to one, and near the other in each and every single class, meant that whatever minor issues he had were quickly tied up and thrown onto the proverbial trash heap.

Harry had gone to each of his teachers, asking if they had any books they would recommend him reading for additional study. It took some threatening from Alistair to get the books from Snape. The Hat added a few suggestions of its own.

On the subject of wands, while Harry and Neville were first brainstorming about how to get back at the Slytherin Duo, he asked

Nev about his wand. He pulled it from a forearm holster. It was a gently tapered ten inch wand, with a lazy spiral of white and black. Harry recognized it. "Another of Ollivander's masterpieces?"

Neville nodded, "You said yours was one, but you never said what it was made of."

Harry pulled his wand, thirteen inches and almost viciously pointed, with thirteen stripes each of jet black and bright red. He then relayed what Ollivander told him about it. Neville then replied with how his own was black fir and white ash, with a gryphon crest feather.

On the Occlumency front, Harry finished up the both the strengthening of his inner mind, and the detail work of his misdirection. Alistair then began teaching him various means how to disorient and confuse invaders, a light gray use of the Art. Harry found Penrose Staircases, labyrinths, and deep banks of fog and mist to be the most effective. He did however create a space he could access from his inner mind, in which he worked on other methods, even if the actual defenses only used the three he currently found effective. He figured it would take some work to make use of more esoteric and logic defying aspects of this particular use.

When the 'festivities' of the Slytherin prank war were gone, Harry started to get anxious about his first Quidditch match. He had taken up pacing whenever he wasn't working, and had even started reading while doing it. No amount of consolation from the more veteran members of the team could stop him. The other rookie player, Chaser and second year Katie Bell, joined in the restless behavior two days before the match.

The morning of the match, the Saturday before Halloween. Harry forced himself to eat, barely able to get any food in him. As Wood called the team to head to the locker room, Neville gave Harry a reassuring grin, and Hermione gave him a comforting look from over a copy of 'Quidditch Through the Ages'.

Oliver gave a speech with a manic gleam in his eyes. The twins of course made fun of him. Harry shouldered the borrowed school broom and team then made its way to the pitch. He fought down his rising anxiety. The captains shook hands, and the game commenced.

Apart from the occasional bludger sent his way, Wood had decided that Harry should keep his play simple for his first game. He simply circled the pitch, staying well above play. Forty-five minutes into play, while he was moving across mid-field and his counter-part was near the Gryffindor goal hoops, he spotted the gleam of the snitch near the ground by the Slytherin goal hoops. Harry continued his leisurely move toward that end of the pitch, and then when he was halfway there, he set off at the broom's top speed, and caught the snitch with no issues. The ending score was 210 – 20.

The following week passed with little of event to note, however Harry became increasingly disconsolate as the week progressed. Neville and Hermione were the only ones who really noticed, being the two he spent the most time with. When Halloween finally came around, he said nothing all day. After lunch Hermione, against Neville's protestations, dragged Harry into an empty classroom and asked, "What is wrong with you?"

The only reply he gave her was a dirty look.

She missed the point, and said, "I'm waiting."

In a tone one might use to explain a simple fact to a small child (and in a very condescending manner), he said, "It's Halloween."

Her perplexed look only served to show that she, like most of the castle population who were celebrating and encouraging Harry to celebrate, meant she just did not get it. Neville, and amazingly the Twins, had been the only ones to catch the meaning his behavior.

And Neville knew exactly what Harry was feeling. He had talked with Harry previously about what had happened to his own parents. About how they had been tortured into insanity, exactly a week after

Harry made a noise that showed his disgust and displeasure, looked at Neville and rolled his eyes, before he turned on the spot and stormed out of the room. Hermione was still clueless and stood rooted on the spot for a moment, before moving to go after him, but was stopped by Neville.

"Neville, we need to know why he is acting like this!"

Neville, in a rather venomous tone, asked, "Hermione. Halloween. The attack on Godric's Hollow. How can you be so thick?"

A look of horror crossed her face, and she clapped a hand to her mouth.

"I would suggest you just give him space for the rest of the day."

And she took Neville's advice. She didn't get Harry to try and talk about it. She didn't try and force him to act like normal. She just let him be. And he was grateful for it. After his last class, he headed up to the common room. He didn't plan on going down to the Feast tonight. He'd figured he could miss one meal, so long as he still took his potion. He was almost finished them anyway.

That plan was altered when the Twins came in from their class, and with one look each at each other and Neville, they frog-marched Harry out of the common room, and into the kitchens. It hadn't really crossed his mind to get food from here, but in the first, and only, words he would speak kindly that day, "Thank you."

A week later, Neville was as quiet as Harry had been on Halloween. Instead of taking any meals in the Great Hall, Harry led him to the kitchens for each meal. Hermione accompanied them, but didn't ask any questions. This was probably due to the fact that Harry would give her a very dirty look whenever she opened her mouth with a questioning look on her face. The day passed in more or less silence for the group, partly because Neville had made sure he had nothing that desperately needed doing that night, and went to bed early.

Once he was out of sight, Hermione started bombarding him with questions, to which he simply replied, "Mind your own bloody business."

The venom in his tone reminded her of how Neville had spoken to her on Halloween. Her mouth formed a small o, a look of horror crossed her face, and she softly said, "Sorry."

"Just don't do it again, Hermione."

He pulled out some of his supplement Transfiguration reading, and settled in for the night.

The next month and three-quarters passed, with little remarkable about it. Sure the twins played pranks, mostly on the one of the following groups; the entirety of Slytherin House, the more stuck-up members of Ravenclaw, or those who cost Gryffindor a large number of points. The few pranks in which Alistair added his own input were particularly memorable. That time at dinner when the whole school broke into a rather insane rendition of Danny Boy left everyone confused. And it gave Harry an idea.

Neville and Harry continued pranking Malfoy and Ronald, who had taken to taunting Harry (and each other) in the hallways. They had also taken to generally deriding the muggleborns students. The pranks stuck to various changes in the color of the offending parties' robes, switching the hair of the pair (to which Malfoy was far more horrified about, Harry and Neville filed this fact away for future use), and with a little help from Padfoot, used some rather potent muggle laxatives against them.

Fred and George were rather pleased with the pair of first years. They started to teach the pair some more... embarrassing spells to use against offending parties. Harry's favorite was a hex which caused the person to uncontrollably pass gas for upwards of an hour, but Neville was rather fond of one that caused the hexed student to waltz.

The two Quidditch games during this period of time, Ravenclaw vs. Hufflepuff and Slytherin vs. Hufflepuff, resulted in two defeats for the house of the loyal, though they put up a good fight of it. Harry had taken a liking to his 'Puff yearmates, even though he only shared one class a week with them, and so could be seen cheering them in both matches.

Classes proceed in the same manner as before, the Gryffindor Trio taking the top places in their house and year, and Hermione and Harry still taking second and first in the year. Harry continued his extra reading, but didn't seek any new lessons from Alistair regarding mental defenses. He spent most of the time working on how to make the new portions of his defenses as surreal and disorienting as possible.

Harry been exchanging letters with Nicolas, Perenelle, and Sirius since he had gotten caught up from being in St. Mungo's. Sirius

more than the others, simply due to his proclivities for pranking. Most letters were sent via school owl, however when he told the Flamels about Hedwig being a phoenix, and also apparently only one of his familiars, he had given the letter to her to deliver. They said he would be pointed toward all the books they had about familiars and phoenixes, and would also try to answer any questions he might have.

Finally, the Winter Holidays started, and Harry, Neville, and Hermione ended up sharing a compartment with the twins, and for most of the ride the boys played a few rounds of exploding snap while Hermione stuck her nose in a book. The ride passed uneventfully, except for some taunting from the Ferret who was accompanied by Crabbe and Goyle as always. It resulted in Malfoy having an uncontrollable case of gas and the walls of meat doing a rather respectable waltz down the train.

On the platform, Padfoot was standing near the Flamels, both the Weasley parents and the little sister were waiting for the Hogwarts contingent of the clan, and Neville's Gran were easily recognized, and the pair of people Hermione went to were apparently her parents. Watching for a few minutes with a slight grin on his face, seeing his friends go to their families, he laughed and made his way to his.

A/N: My thanks to the reviewers once more. I think there is this chapter after this one, with maybe one with some decent action following it, and that will round out the year.

I'll take some time after that to reread what I've written so far and see if any errors jump out and bite me. But be warned, while I may get the glaring errors, there are probably some turns of phrase that come off clunky that I will ignore because I understand them, and I also have a tendency to make up words through the use of pre- and suffixes.

Anyone interested in being a Beta for this process, please send me a message. (8/23/10)

Chapter 15: The Second Christmas

Dumbledore was upset. His normal means of observing what was going on in the castle refused to report to him about Harry. From the portraits and ghosts, all the way down to the house-elves, they refused to speak to him about the boy. He had been considering returning some of the heirlooms he had recovered from the cottage at Godric's Hallow following the deaths of James and Lily, thinking it would gain some measure of trust from the boy. But he could not find the items anywhere. He wanted to howl in frustration.

Greeting his two guardians and his godfather, they decided to go out into non-magical London for lunch. Exiting the platform, they were greeted by a grinning Remus. At the meal, Sirius talked mainly about how he would have had Harry over, but none of the homes he had inherited from his family were fit for human habitation.

"I am still trying to decide what to do with the Black ancestral home. I'm not sure whether to sell it, clean it up, or burn it down. I really hated that place growing up... I've written you a few times about how poorly my family and I got along."

Harry put on a rather evil grin, and said, "Well, you shouldn't bite your nose off to spite your face. No, you should instead put the nose through massive reconstructive surgery. Turn it into something you would like, and the thing you would like, your family would hate."

Sirius just stared blankly at Harry for a full minute, his jaw hanging open. Remus chortled, Pen just rolled her eyes, and Nic shook his

head with an amused look on his face. Padfoot finally regained the use of his voice and said, "That is the type of plan your mother would come up with. I think that by the time we were all in fifth year, the entire school, save your father, went out of their way to avoid irritating her. When she took action against someone, it was in such a way that while you never knew who did it to you; everyone still knew it was her. And the fact that she always kept pictures to use against me as blackmail for later, well... let's just say your first Christmas was more peaceful than any of the Marauders originally planned due to her 'special' photo album."

The conversation of the meal then circled around the stories about his parents, much to Harry's (visible) pleasure.

Harry woke up the next morning, and for want of something better to do, and after remembering just how useful it was for pulling the rug out from under Snape, Harry began his second read-through of the Hogwarts Charter. He was interrupted at about six-thirty by a rapping on his window. Opening the window, he let the owl, Gringotts Secure Owl Number Thirteen to be precise, in. He divested it of both the expected letter from his account manager and the unexpected package. He briefly wondered why the goblin seemed to exclusively use this particular owl, but dismissed the thought.

He went into his trunk and pulled out a small bowl and a pair of owl treats. He went to his bathroom, filled the bowl with water, and set it out for the owl. He handed it one of the owl treats, sat down in a nearby chair, and opened the letter.

Mr. Harry Potter,

As per your inquest in your last letter, a blood/magic heir ceremony is a simple ritual that uses the magically self-updating records of Gringotts and a combination goblin post-cognition and aura diagnostic magics to trace the lineage of a witch or wizard. It yields a simple list of the families the person is heir to. I can have it prepared for you to go through at noon on December the Twenty-Seventh, so if that is agreeable, please create an appointment through your reply letter.

As to what you so quaintly refer to as plan Q/G-7, my directives have gone off without issue and the plan itself should see fruition on Christmas Morning.

You may well be wondering about the package carried by the owl. In doing the requested audit of your Family accounts, I found a number of heirlooms that were 'being held in trust until the Heir is of such an age to appreciate them' by your previous financial guardian. Items of rarity and/or monetary value have been placed in your family vaults. Those that I have deemed of sentimental value, and also one item which would be of benefit to your safety and defense, have been included in a shrunken chest. A simple wand tap shall return it to normal size.

May All Your Ventures Yield Profit,

Griphook

Potter Accounts Manager

Harry nodded, grinned, and then looked surprised in response the letter. He had sent a few letters back and forth with the goblin, mainly to get into the habit of keeping track of his finances, and had received one quarterly report so far, it being for the one ended in September. He had been more than a little surprised at the sheer size of his Family account, and in more than a little shock of the ten percent return on the investments. The first letter had included the information that Nicolas had informed Griphook that Harry was allowed to make decisions regarding investments and control of voting proxies.

He opened the package, set the breadbox-sized chest on the floor, and tapped it with his wand. He sat down on floor in front of it, and opened it with shaking hands. Inside was a photo album and a pair of journals, all three charmed to have more pages than normal. He flipped through the first few pages and he saw various wizarding photographs from his parents' time at Hogwarts, and deciding to go over it carefully later, he set it aside for later. The two journals were his mother's charms notes, and his father's transfiguration notes. He read a few pages from each and barely understood what either were writing about most of the time. Next out came a pair of wands, which

he assumed were his parents'. A stuffed toy, a black dog, and he remembered this was his stuffed Padfoot. He briefly wondered what had become of the stuffed stag and wolf he had had. At the very bottom was a silvery, fluid like material.

It was at this time, with the last object in his hands, that Nicolas came in to get Harry for breakfast. He looked at the pile of stuff surrounding Harry and quirked a questioning eyebrow. "My account manager recovered a number of items that Dumbledore had been holding in trust for me until he had 'deemed me ready'." He held up the item he was holding. "Any idea what this is?"

"That would be your father's invisibility cloak. Come on, it's time for breakfast."

Harry grunted and hauled himself off the floor. "I'd like to get to Gringotts on the 27th. I vaguely remember you mentioning that you don't keep the house on the Floo Network. "

Nicolas nodded as they walked toward the kitchen. "Gonna finally take a peek into the Family vaults?"

"Actually I was going to schedule a blood/magic heir ceremony, but that would be a good idea too. I need to grab a journal my mother said would be there. Apparently my father prepared for the contingency of there being no living Potters besides me."

"When?"

"Noon."

"We can do that."

Harry sent a reply via Lucky, as he had come to dub the owl. And then he spent the days leading up until Christmas cooped up inside. He had never been particularly fond of the cold and the snow, and instead spent the time curled up in front of the fire in the sitting room, reading either books about phoenixes and familiars, or wizarding fiction, which comprised of some of the worst poetry he had ever laid eyes upon, or extremely overdone epics. He only continued to read them for the ammunition they would give his mental defenses. He also went through the photo album, and it both upset and comforted him.

Perenelle informed him that they would be having Sirius and Remus over for Christmas. Harry looked through the photos again, and got some ammunition for his own peace of mind.

Waking up on Christmas morning, Harry decided he wanted more sleep, so he stuffed his head under a pillow, rolled over, and went back to sleep. He managed to sleep for a good while longer before he was woken up by something bounding onto, and bouncing on, his bed. He pulled his head out from under the pillow and found a very large black dog. Sitting up, with the stuffed Padfoot under one arm, he hit the real one with a pillow. He jumped off the bed and turned back to normal.

"Come on, Harry! Presents!"

Harry's face blanked. He had presents. On Christmas. Someone had given him gifts.

From the door, someone who sounded like Remus said, "I think you broke him, Padfoot."

"Huh?"

In a small voice, Harry asked, "I have presents?"

Looking at each other darkly, Remus and Sirius both said, "Of course."

Harry heaved himself out of bed, gave the pair a pointed look, and made his way to the bathroom. They took the hint and left, closing the door behind them.

Fifteen minutes later, Harry made his way into the kitchen, where breakfast was underway, but he still had a rather shell-shocked look on his face. Alistair had absolutely refused to be left behind, besides which he had owl-ordered a bunch presents for people he knew, Hat included. He had never really expected anyone to get him anything (he was still too used to the Dursleys locking him in his cupboard on Christmas), but he wanted to give the people he liked gifts.

After they had eaten, they opened presents. Sirius and Remus got Zonko's products and notes that Harry had indeed gotten his hands

on some more 'interesting' photographs his mother or father had taken of the two of them. He told Padfoot he particularly liked the one of him as a pink and purple Grim, and the one of Moony being chased by oversized, fire-breathing chickens was quite lovely. They both looked rather scared after reading their individual notes. He got Nicolas and Perenelle jumpers that had magically animated flames. He apologized that he couldn't think of anything else to get them. He opened Alistair's for him, and inside were a set of feathers to stick in the cap. Peacock, eagle, and a tail feather that Hedwig had donated. He had sent Neville a collection of magical plant seeds, and Hermione was given a trio of books on Occlumency, which Neville had told Harry she had asked about, with a note saying not to have her ask either of them about the subject anymore. He sent the twins even more Zonko's stuff than he gave the Marauders, with the anticipation that they would only use them against those who deserved it.

From Sirius he got a mirror he was told would allow him to talk to Sirius without have to write letters back and forth, and since that had been James's, he also got a set Quidditch armor, specifically for the Seeker position, Remus got him a never-ending journal to take notes in, Nicolas had gotten him an enchanted bird stand that would shrink and be restored at wand-tapped commands, and Perenelle had gotten him a box with an expanded interior, charmed to keep its contents ever-fresh, and it was filled with herbs to feed Hedwig. Neville had sent him a book on dueling tactics, and Hermione had sent him a homework planner. The twins had sent him a few Zonko's products, and for some reason he couldn't fathom, he got a jumper and tin of fudge from their mother. He also got a letter from Madam Bones forwarding the results of his tortures' trials. Life in Azkaban, no parole. Dudley had been shipped off to his Aunt Marge.

Following lunch, Remus and Sirius had dragged Harry out into a movie theater that was showing a few Christmas classics. The two Marauder's had already decided on 'A Christmas Story', which Harry ended up berating the two for. He called the main character a number of names, the least of which being git and moron. The two decided Harry also had his mother's tastes in regards to entertainment.

At dinner that night, Remus taking a look at Harry's hair, asked, "When was the last time you got that disaster trimmed?"

Harry actually had to think about it for a minute. Sure, for the longest time his aunt and uncle had forced him to try and get his hair cut to tame it, but it always regrew quickly, but then there was the time his aunt had basically lopped it all off save the fringe that hid his scar, and when it grew back over night they had decided not to waste money on hair cuts for him anymore. He eventually came up with an answer, "Two years ago, give or take a couple months?"

This answer struck the conversations at the table dead for a few minutes, and put either thoughtful or amazed looks on their faces. All Harry could say was, "What?"

Sirius grinned, and said, "Let's get you through the rest of the school year, and then I'll explain why that it is significant."

With an answering shrug, Harry dug back into his food.

Arriving at Gringotts two days later, with Nicolas deciding to wait at the Leaky Cauldron, and half an hour before the scheduled appoint, Harry told the receptionist that he waited Griphook's pleasure. He waited about fifteen minutes before the goblin came out and led Harry to another room, which before entering he was divested of anything magical in nature, to which he thanked the gods for his preference for muggle clothes. Every inch of the walls and ceiling were carved with runes, and the floor had seven solid metal circles set into it. He was given a potion to drink and set in a chair in the center-most circle. Griphook then explained that he would have to wait for about an hour, and then he would have to give some blood. He would have his results an hour after that.

Griphook then left him there, with a small stack of muggle magazines to read. Old muggle magazines. Harry grinned at this, having had a number of conversations with Neville about the idiocy of blood purity. A pureblood would be sitting here, naked or next to it, with nothing to read but things written by people they despised. Muggleborns and more than a few half-bloods would possibly get the joke about old magazines and waiting rooms. He opened a copy of TIME from 1979 and started to kill time.

An hour later, as Griphook walked back in, Harry had finished the stack of magazines, and was in the middle of his thirty-second verse of 'Henery the Eighth, I Am'. He had to talk to Sirius about the possibility of a charm to make Slytherins sing that song endlessly.

The goblin was grinning, and Harry had the feeling that they watched this room like muggles watched TV. Harry was led back to Griphook's office, where his palm was cut and he bled into a bowl of some blue liquid, until the contents turned silver. His hand was then healed.

And then Griphook led Harry down to his Family vault. Harry grabbed the simple brown leather bound journal that was on a table near the door, and then roamed around looking at the various objects in the vault. There were no magical portraits in estimate, though there were a number of wands, a good many books, and quite a bit of jewelry. Apart from the rather obvious gold. Leaving the vault and going back up into the bank proper, he took the journal and started reading it, waiting for the results.

Eventually, Griphook conducted him back into the office, saying, "The results are rather... interesting." He slid a piece of parchment across the desk. Harry read it, blinked several times, read it again, and had a look of sheer awe cross his face.

Harry said, in a hushed tone, "Now what are the odds of that..."

"It has been a few centuries since this ceremony has been used this way, but we will also be using the entirety of the raw information to build a complete family tree. Normally, Gringotts only provides a list such as that. But it will take time. I will inform you when it is complete."

Harry handed the list back to Griphook and said, "Can you see to it that that makes its way into the Family vault?"

"Of course Mr. Potter."

"Thank you very much for your time, Griphook. May your vaults overflow with gold."

"Have a good day Mr. Potter, may all your ventures yield a profit."

The rest of the holidays went by, with Harry having found the Flamels' collection of wizarding periodicals. So he managed to pass the time by dividing his time between reading those periodicals (mainly those relating to brooms and Quidditch), what wizarding fiction he could stomach, and his supplemental reading for class, the

last of which he was beginning to run out of. Finally the day before he had to leave came around, and he packed his things up. He spent the rest of the day applying all he had worked out about adding confusion to his mental defenses.

The following day, shrunken trunk in his pocket, and Hedwig on his shoulder, the Flamels apparated to the Platform, but Hedwig took care of the transport for her and Harry. Harry had managed to convince both Hedwig and the Flamels into doing this. He wanted to experience what it was like to be transported by a phoenix just once, and so, disappearing from the house in one burst of flame, and then reappearing on the Platform in another, Harry immediately began thanking and flattering Hedwig. She was appropriately smug about it.

Being one of first on the train, Harry went to the last compartment in the last car, and settled in for the train ride back to the school. He was joined shortly thereafter by Hermione, and then later by Neville. He thanked them for the presents, and was thanked in returned. He did put a bit of irritation when he talked to Hermione about her present to him, and she immediately said she'd keep her nose out of his homework habits. The twins dropped by five minutes before the train would leave, and promised to check in on them.

But before they left, he asked why their mother had sent him a Christmas gift. They pulled him into the corridor and briefly spoke of what they had guessed about his past (and they had guessed very well), told him they would never speak of it to anyone, but may have mentioned it to their mother that Harry probably wasn't expecting any Christmas presents. And they firmly believed that everyone should at least get something for the holiday.

Part way through the train ride, Malfoy dropped by for some taunting, before Harry threw a cupcake at him. He blinked confusedly, huffed, and stormed off, and Harry tested a spell as he retreated. Fifteen minutes later the Ferret started singing,

"I'm Henery the Eighth, I am
Henery the Eighth I am, I am!
I got married to the widow next door..."

He was bewildered by the compulsion to sing this horrid song... and he couldn't get it out of his head!

Dumbledore was confused. He watched as the students entered the school, and could not believe the fact that Harry had a phoenix, a white phoenix, riding on his shoulder. And it appeared that he and Neville had become fast friends. He was at a loss for the first time in a long time. He could not think of a plan to accomplish what he needed done. And it scared him.

A/N2: For those of you who are curious as to the results of Harry's heir ceremony, tough. I am keeping that close to the vest, and doling it out when I feel like it, a piece at a time. And not before.

Song credit: "I'm Henery the Eighth, I Am" originally by Fred Murray and R.P. Weston. Later revived by Herman's Hermits.

A/N: I am starting to run out of creative variations of this, so I'm just going to say it. My thanks to the reviewers.

This chapter will cover almost the entirety of the rest of the year, and the chapter that follows will probably be shorter, have some kind of action in some form, and finish it up. (8/23/10)

Chapter 16: Further Time and a Miscalculation

As Harry entered the common room, he was grabbed roughly around the shoulders by Wood, and told, "McGonagall has called for a meeting of the House Team in her office at seven." Harry nodded and brought his things up to the dorm, took out his mother's charms notes, and started rereading a section he both understood and thought would be very useful.

At five of seven, he stood outside his Head of House's office, along with the other six players. He was still reading those notes, and absently tapping his foot. The door opened and the team filed in. They all took various positions standing in front of her desk, some of the team more anxious than others. Harry, standing behind everyone else, stuffed the journal into an inside pocket of his robes.

McGonagall cleared her throat and said, "Well I have some interesting news. Courtesy of an anonymous donor, the Gryffindor House Quidditch Team now has the use of seven brand new, top of the line Cleansweeps." The team broke into cheers and excited shouting. Harry just smiled and nodded his head. "I can see you are all very excited. Here is to hoping that this will help us win the cup this year. Mr. Potter, I'd like to speak to you about one of your class assignments, the rest of you may leave."

As the last team member left and closed the door behind her, Harry said, "I know, I am a terrible actor, Professor."

All the professor did in response to this was raise an eyebrow.

"So I am assuming you want me to explain."

"Please do, Mr. Potter."

"In the simplest terms, it is a secondary means to get around the rule that first years cannot own brooms. However it will also allow

other Gryffindors to play for the team without owning their brooms, or relying on the questionable school brooms. I'll probably use the Cleansweep for the two remaining games of the year, and then come back with my very own racing broom next year."

"I must admit Mr. Potter, that is a bit of reasoning worthy of a Ravenclaw, put into effect with the cunning of a Slytherin, and done with the team spirit of a Hufflepuff. So if I may ask, why are you in my house?"

"Quite simple Professor, I choose. Is that all?"

"Yes, Mr. Potter, have a good night."

"You too, ma'am."

Entering into the common room, Harry was once more accosted, this time by Neville. All he said was, "I need to talk to you and Alistair." Harry turned on his heel and left the common room, Neville right behind, and after poking his head into a few of the rooms closer to the common room, he found an empty one.

Using a simple cleaning charm, he removed the layer of dust from the long abandoned desk, and set Alistair on it, who morphed back to his default form. Neville entered the room a moment later.

Alistair started the conversation, "I assumed they found something?"

Neville nodded, the corner of his left eye twitching.

Harry sighed and said, "It wasn't as bad as it was with me, was it?"

Neville shook his head, and spoke in a hoarse voice, "No, there were only a trio of minor blocks on my magic, and those had almost been broken already, but one of them had been specifically designed to block accidental magic. My family put me through hell trying to force magic out of me, all because of Dumbledore!"

Alistair made an upset grunting sound, and then intoned, "I, ALISTAIR, THE SORTING HAT OF HOGWARTS, VOICE OF THE FOUNDERS FOUR, hereby do declare Neville Franklin Longbottom to be a Ward of Hogwarts. I assume Harry has told you everything he has found in the Charter concerning Wards?"

Neville nodded. "Yes, if I think of anything to ask, I'll ask Harry. He can relay it to you."

Putting the Hat, who quickly transformed to a basic black watchcap, on his head, Harry said, "Come on, Nev. Let's go see if Dean and Seamus want to play a game of exploding snap."

The following day saw a puzzled Dumbledore walking the halls of his school. He had asked some of his spies in the castle for information of Neville, to see what he could find out about Harry by proxy, but they were refusing to report on that boy too. It was infuriating, to have been master of this castle for so long, unopposed and unhindered, that he was now being contested so often. He didn't notice when one of the suits of armor stuck out a leg to trip him...

As classes resumed, Harry became who his yearmates in his house came to for help. Sure Dean and Seamus had already come to him a few times, but Parvati and Lavender had gone to Hermione until they finally got fed up with her regurgitating the textbooks word for word when they had overheard Harry explaining it in rather simple terms to Seamus at the same time. And it actually suited Hermione just fine; she had started to get fed up with people who just couldn't get it when she explained something.

Harry remained mostly inactive on the prank front. While he aided and abetted the Twins and Neville, he did not initiate any of his own. When asked about what he was planning by the other three, his answering smile was almost demonic and combined with his silence, they found it most unsettling. They stopped asking after the third time. Fred was starting to have nightmares.

When the first Quidditch match of the new year rolled around, and it was Gryffindor vs. Ravenclaw. The match was short. Gryffindor scored three quick goals and, before the Ravens even got to make an attempt at Wood's hoops, Harry made a spectacular dive and snatched the snitch, winning the game 180 - 0. Gryffindor's next game the following month, this one verses Hufflepuff, lasted for two hours. By the time the Snitch finally showed up, Harry was just praying for the end, to save his second favorite house further humiliation. An easy catch later, Gryffindor was a shoe in for the Quidditch cup, the game's score 450 – 60.

The Monday after Gryffindor secured the Quidditch cup, anyone who watched Draco Malfoy and Ronald Weasley would have wondered why, every hour on the hour, like clockwork, they would say an increasing number and hum a few bars of the 1812 overture.

As the school neared the Spring Holidays, most of the student body in the upper years became rather frantic in their studies. Harry however had finally run out of reading material. So, he went to each of his teachers asking if they had any more recommendations, and he was given suggestions for basic reading to go through in preparation for second year.

Harry had started taking long walks when the weather broke. He occasionally had Neville with him, but it did not occur too often. He seemed to manage at least seven miles a week. He also took to throwing treats to the Giant Squid, and having tea with Hagrid once a week. Just because the man was a patsy for Dumbledore didn't mean he wasn't one of the friendliest blokes Harry had ever met.

During the Spring Holidays something very strange happened in the castle. Students started getting purple hands. It started in Ravenclaw, and spread through the house like the cold. Sometime between lunch and dinner on the first day it spread to Hufflepuff. By breakfast the next day most of Ravenclaw had it, and all of Hufflepuff. A good many Gryffindors had it, but no one in Slytherin. Lunch came with the majority of Gryffindor sporting purple hands, the rest of Ravenclaw, and Crabbe and Goyle from Slytherin. A day and a half, later there was not a member of the student body without purple hands, and even a few staff members had it. Everyone's hands returned to normal shortly after lunch five days after it began.

The Saturday two weeks after the spring term started, Crabbe and Goyle were quarantined in the Hospital wing with what appeared to be Spattergroit. Being Crabbe and Goyle, nobody thought that to be strange for those two gorillas to get that particular ailment.

Two days later, at breakfast, Ronald and Malfoy both started singing a verse of 'I'm Henery the Eighth, I Am', once every five minutes. It spread to the rest of Slytherin by the time everyone went to bed that night. But then, it spread to Ravenclaw at breakfast the next morning. By the time dinner came around there was not a house unaffected.

At breakfast the following morning, Professor McGonagall called for whoever caused this to turn them self or selves in.

After dinner Harry knocked on the door of Professor McGonagall's office, his face mostly blank. Even though he had gotten better about feeling his emotions, he still tended not to show them. Entering and taking a seat as directed, she asked, "Did you already go through the basic books for second year, Mr. Potter?"

He shook his head, and staring at a space two inches above her left shoulder, said, "I did it."

"You? What? How?"

"I said..." He broke into a verse of the song. "I'm responsible for that. It was never supposed to spread beyond Slytherin."

"And just how did you, a first year, manage a... viral... charm for lack of a better term?"

He smiled, "My mum's charms notes."

"Why? Why do something like this? I assume it was you behind the whole purple hands fiasco?"

"I wanted to see if I could combine my mother's notes on time delaying a charm, setting it to repeat, and adding a viral aspect to it. I used the purple hands to test the viral aspect and see if and how it would move into Slytherin."

"And when you saw that Messers. Crabbe and Goyle were the first to get the purple hands... How did you manage to get them to catch Spattergroit?"

"Potioned cake. Those two would eat anything not tied down, so I am not really guilty of anything if they would eat found cake."

The professor was struck speechless by this.

"So what is my punishment, ma'am?"

"Yes. Yes. For having the courage and honor to come to me, Gryffindor gets 15 points. You get 20 points for the rather amazing

spell work. But I am going to have to take 75 points from Gryffindor for this rather outrageous prank, and you are going to have to serve a detention with Hagrid on Friday night."

Harry nodded, asked after another verse of the song, "Yes, ma'am. Is that all?"

"Just a question and a comment. When will this end?"

"Breakfast tomorrow, the finale should be quite a spectacle. And the comment?"

"I'm glad I figured out why Alistair gave you the option of Gryffindor."

"Thank you, Professor McGonagall. If I may say, I'm glad that we're still in the lead for the House Cup."

"So am I, Mr. Potter. Have a good night."

"You too, ma'am."

After Harry left and closed the door, the stern woman broke down laughing, and knew that if her godson was still alive today, he would be proud of his son. In so many more ways than one.

At breakfast the next day, every last student, and even a few teachers, suddenly began, all at once, and all in unison:

"Eight-hundred and sixty-fourth verse, same as the first
I'm Henery the Eighth, I am,
Henery the Eighth I am, I am!
I got married to the widow next door,
She'd been married seven times before.
And everyone was a Henery
She wouldn't have a Willie or a Sam
I'm her eighth old man named Henery
Henery the Eighth, I am!"

A/N2: I just had to have Harry do something over the top. And it managed to get him in a detention with Hagrid, which I needed. And for those of you wondering where Norbert is, remember Quirrellmort isn't there to trick him into spilling how to get past Fluffy, and that exchange is where he got the egg.

Song Credit: "I'm Henery the Eighth, I Am" originally by Fred Murray and R.P. Weston. Later revived by Herman's Hermits.

A/N (Proofread): Rereading the chapter, I found that I had the song going on for three days instead of the two in my head. Fixed the number of verses.

A/N: My thanks to the reviewers. Hopefully, this will not take too long to write, and I can get started on the error checking of the seventeen chapters that comprise of book 1's rewrite. And I've made a decision to not write accents. I find them a pain in the backside to read, and next to impossible to write. (8/24/10)

Chapter 17: Fated I :: The Specter

Harry left breakfast after eating as quickly as possible. Thankfully McGonagall had not made an announcement about just who was responsible for this disaster. Because if the student body didn't end up lynching him here and now, they would very well end up doing it later. He had used that song for the simple reason that it had a disturbing tendency to get stuck in peoples' heads. He had been hoping that at least Malfoy's and Ronald's exposure to the song would last for a while... But with the entire school singing it? He had no clue when the last person would get it out of their head.

Alistair, who had been cheering on this marvelous bit of chaos, had become even more amused when it had leaked outside of Slytherin House. And Sirius had wanted updates as Harry had slowly geared up for what would be the largest prank of his first year. Being that it was Thursday Harry had plenty of time until class started, and he had yet to tell Padfoot just how far out of control things had gotten.

But then again, it had been out of his control since the spells flew. Making his way into an empty broom cupboard, he pulled out the two-way mirror and muttered, "Padfoot."

In the glass, a disheveled and mostly asleep Sirius appeared. "Mrgh, it's too early pup... Pup!" He woke up from one use of the word to the next, and his face lit with mirth. "So how'd the prank go?"

"Like a train wreck."

"Well your father and I never figured out what was more amusing, when the plans went off without a hitch, or when they derailed in a catastrophic fashion. So on, a scale of one to ten, one being the lowest, how big of a disaster was it."

"A thirteen."

"Explain, pup, explain."

"You remember how I explained how the purple hands only seemed to spread into Slytherin from Crabbe and Goyle." Sirius nodded. "Well I was wrong."

A look of surprise and awe crossed the old prankster's face, and he asked in a hushed tone, "Just how much of the school did you get?"

"Every last member of the student body, and at least half of the staff, including Remus..." A look of surprise hit Harry like a ton of bricks. "That... that... old... I don't know what to call him! Did you tell him what I was planning?"

Sirius looked confused for a moment, and said, "Of course pup..." And then he too was hit by comprehension.

"So how does that rate my prank then?"

Sirius closed his eyes and muttered for a few moments, and said, "It was a well planned masterpiece of a junior Marauder that was given a gentle push by a master into legendary status."

"I just hope no one finds out it was me. If this song sticks around like I think it may, I could be lynched. I know for certain I am going to be cornered by the twins and Neville, sooner rather than later. And I confessed to McGonagall."

"Why?"

"Because it had spiraled out of control, and she asked that the person responsible to report to her office."

"What's the damage?"

"Net loss of 40 points and a detention with Hagrid on Friday night."

"Not too shabby."

"I've got some things I need to do, have a good day Sirius."

"Have a good day pup."

And in fact, as he came out of the broom cupboard, he was dragged into an empty classroom by the Twins, with Neville tagging along, who asked, and were told, how he had done it. He also explained just how it had gotten out of control. When they asked why he did it alone, he simply said that the spell modifiers came from his mother's notes, as though it was the simplest thing in the world. And it was. To Harry. The others needed to take a minute to think about it, and then it dawned on them.

He conveniently left out his suspicion about how it had gotten out of the target house, but did tell them how he went to McGonagall. All three called him a 'noble git'. He also refused all attempts to get the viral spell modification from his notes. He did however promise them copies of the notes on time delays.

Classes that day, and the day that followed, went smoothly, but the number of people humming the song under their breath or even singing a few lines, was staggering. Harry fervently prayed to anyone that would hear his pleas, that his status as the culprit would remain secret. But Friday night came all too quickly.

Being led from the castle by Professor McGonagall, sometime shortly before eleven, Harry said, "I figured out how the charm vectored out of Slytherin."

"How?"

"Professor Moony."

If it had been any other person in existence he had been talking to, he would have sworn the sound she made was a snicker. "Did you tell him about what you were planning?"

"No, however my dogfather couldn't keep his mouth shut."

"And what did you learn?"

"That I am to keep any and all Marauders on a need-to-know basis, and they never need to know until after the fact."

"Take five points for a lesson well learned, Mr. Potter."

They passed the rest of the trip to Hagrid's hut in silence. She simply told him to do whatever Hagrid said for him to do, and left him with the large, gentle man who had a preference for deadly creatures.

"All right, Harry?"

"Fine, Hagrid."

"We have to go into the Forest. Like I told you over tea, something has been killing animals in there, and I have no idea what. It has been happening since after the feast."

Harry blinked. And he quickly chained facts together into a logical, and horrifying, conclusion. Dumbledore had baited the castle with something of the Flamels'. Voldemort had come to take the bait. He had been run out of the castle by the castle. Nic and Pen had retrieved their item, but only Dumbledore, Harry, Alistair, and a few others knew that. No one who knew would tell Voldemort.

So while both trap and bait were gone, the quarry to be trapped was still hanging around.

Bugger.

So Harry followed Hagrid into the forest, staying as close to the massive man as possible without being stepped on. For two hours, he followed Hagrid around the forest. Nothing really bothered either of them, but Harry couldn't escape the feeling that he was being watched. So he gripped his lit wand a little more tightly.

After a third hour, Hagrid finally said they were going back to the castle.

It all happened so quickly that it wasn't until he had a chance to carefully go over the memory that he figured out what exactly had happened. Harry had tripped over a tree root, and fallen face first into the mud. Hagrid, with his long strides, was a good thirty feet away before he noticed Harry had fallen. Dazed from the face plant, Harry was only vaguely aware of the tree that fell and blocked him off from his protector.

He was trying, in vain, to dust himself off and clear the ringing from his ears when he heard Hagrid yell for him to stay right where he was. Unsettled by being alone in the forest, he put his back to the nearest tree. He looked around nervously hoping for Hagrid to hurry.

But when he heard a sibilant whisper say, "Potter..." The bottom dropped out of his stomach and his fear upgraded to something short of panic. It whispered again, and Harry was able to place the direction it was coming from. He started to back away.

A very large snake came into view, and it must have been at least ten feet long. It reared up and Harry saw that its face was... deformed. It looked like a twisted parody of a human face.

One word, one name, came to his mind.

Voldemort.

His fear and near panic evaporated in a puff of rage. He stopped retreating and leveled his wand at the... thing... that housed the malignant spirit of the Dark Lord.

And it laughed.

So Harry sent a quick chain of a cutting curse, a piercing hex, and a bludgeoning spell at it. The snake was dead before the last spell batted it into a tree. But then it didn't really do any good.

In the place where the snake was, there was something far more solid than a ghost, but infinitely more corrupted. And it laughed.

"Oh, Potter, you may look like your father, but you definitely have your mother's spirit. I'm lucky that I caught her that night without her wand."

The red rage in Harry had evaporated, to be replaced by a cold dread.

"I was just about to give up on getting in the castle, Potter. It had somehow blocked my attempts to get in, no matter what body I stole... But now, with a student, I may finally be able to get what I came for. If you cooperate, I may even let you live to serve me."

Barely controlling his shaking, he gathered every bit of defiance he could muster and shoved it into one word.

"Never."

"Then I shall use your body to get my own back, and leave your corpse sitting in the Great Hall!"

The spirit of Lord Voldemort then charged at Harry, who reacted without thinking, lashing out with the first spell that came to mind, a minor shock spell. The spirit howled in pain, and then slammed into Harry.

Harry felt the outer most of the seven stone walls of his mind vaporize, the magic of the first dome shatter, and metal and wood of the primary gate groan. The vault where he kept the memory of that Halloween, that memory with the feeling of connection, groaned from a sudden assault. He could almost hear his magic cry out in pain from the contact with whatever it was that Voldemort had become. And it felt like every nerve of his body had been set on fire. And it happened all at once. For the first time in a long time, Harry Potter screamed out in pain.

But below the pain, below the assault on his mind, magic, and body, on the edge of what he could sense, he felt something else respond. He could tell that whatever it was, it was angry. It did not like the thing that was attacking him, and it responded with an attack of its own. And as power surged up from the depths, as Harry felt an obstruction or two just out of sight and hearing collapse, he fell down into the blackness of unconsciousness.

As Hagrid finally heaved himself over the fallen tree, he heard a blood curdling scream of pain. And he saw Harry, shaking like mad, as he suddenly burst into a pulse of white and gold light, a light that pushed a spirit of some kind from him, a light that made the spirit shriek in pain and send it fleeing like a demon chased by holy men. The light went out, and Harry dropped to the ground. Running over and scooping Harry up, who still had his wand in a death grip, the large man sprinted back to the castle.

Harry groaned in pain. It felt like he had been hit by a train. He heard talking but he couldn't make heads or tails of it. He was content to just lay there for a good long while, until he felt he could stay still no

longer. He forced his eyes open and saw most of his favorite adults hovering over him. He looked around and saw that he was in the hospital wing. He heaved himself into a sitting position, most of his body protesting in pain.

He looked around at Sirius, Nicolas, and Perenelle. Madam Pomfrey was coming out of her office, and he heard the far doors of the Hospital Wing open. Madam Pomfrey started checking him over, and he sat still, letting her. He wanted to know just how much damage he had suffered.

Straightening and muttering to herself after finish, Madam Pomfrey nodded to Remus and McGonagall, who had come into view. Everyone was just staring at him.

So, he gathered up some of his meager strength, scowled, and hoarsely grated out the word, "What?"

Sirius beat everyone else by saying, "You've been out for two days, Harry! Just what in the name of Merlin happened out in the forest?"

Coughing, Harry took a minute to respond, "The diseased spirit of someone who styled himself a Lord, and believed that there was something in this castle that would help him get his body back."

The six adults shared fearful looks, and Professor McGonagall was the one to put forth the question, "You were attacked by You-Know-Who?"

Harry didn't even deign that with a verbal answer, and so nodded.

"Do you mind telling us what happened?"

"Gimme a glass of water and five minutes."

They did and, after taking a chance to sort through his memories from that night (he left the damage to his defenses to be repaired later), he told them exactly what happened. He managed to get, in return, exactly what happened afterward.

Madam Pomfrey then shooed everyone out, and threatened to dose Harry with sleeping potion if he didn't get some rest.

He was all too happy to oblige her.

Harry was not let out of the hospital wing until Thursday. Neville and Hermione brought him his work and kept him company. Sirius visited for an hour every day, and Nicolas and Perenelle visited him on Wednesday. He was achy and tired easily when he was finally set loose, and it took a fortnight from his release to get back to normal.

The soonest he could get Neville alone, he did so, and he told the other boy and Alistair exactly what had happened. Alistair was right irritated that Dumbledore's half baked plan had resulted in Voldemort hanging around at the edge of the castle's defenses for so long, and miffed that she had decided to send a student into the Forbidden Forest as a detention. She had probably assumed Hagrid would make Harry eat his cooking, which Alistair heard was awful enough to be considered a punishment. Neville congratulated Harry on standing his ground and fighting.

The rest of the school year passed rather quickly. Classes were the same as they always were, and Harry edged even further ahead in his studies. When the last Quidditch match of the year rolled around, Ravenclaw vs. Slytherin, the match lasted for a brutal hour. The scores didn't manage to climb too high, and when the Ravens won out over the Snakes, the Lions still took the Quidditch cup.

Harry found the exams to be rather simple, and somehow managed to talk Hermione down after each one. She would only wind up giving herself an ulcer if she fretted over each one only moments after it was finished. And given that, given that she had finally started to recognize others' opinions as valid, he finally told her about what had happened during the Opening Feast. He left out everything he had kept from Neville, like the results of his heir ceremony, and he kept the fact that either him or Neville were involved in a prophecy involving Voldemort quiet, but otherwise he told her everything. He also told her what had happened in the forest. Again, he was surprised at how it had made him feel better.

All of it horrified her, and made her feel like she had been more than a little mean. She then shared her childhood with them. How she had been unable to make friends and had turned to books. About how the other students had made fun of the bookworm and the teacher's pet. Neville then related his own rocky childhood of being

thought a squib, and the attempts to scare some show of magic out of him.

It was good to have people to relate to.

The leaving feast was eaten amid Gryffindor colors. Without Snape's blatant favoritism, the Slytherins were in dead last with Ravenclaw in third. A few points ahead of them were the hardworking Hufflepuffs. Harry had an enjoyable time, but cringed when a number of people still sang the occasional verse of the song he had pranked the school with. Hermione briefly wondered if that bizarre occurrence would make it into the next revision of 'Hogwarts, A History'. He and Neville had decided it would be better to keep her out of the loop when it came to pranking.

The next day found everyone packed up and on the train. Neville and Harry killed most of the time by playing exploding snap. They were joined by a couple of different first years, including a Ravenclaw named Terry Boot and a Hufflepuff named Ernie Macmillan.

As the train pulled up to the platform, he wished his pair of friends a good summer, promised to write, grabbed his trunk, and made his way off the train. He had a grin plastered on his face. He had no clue what he was going to do for the summer, but he knew he would at the very least enjoy it.

Here Ends Book I

A/N: My thanks to my reviewers. This is going to be a micro-chapter, posted in conjunction with the proofread versions of the previous chapters. I have also added a number of minor details. I plan on writing a chapter like this between each book, up until at least the fifth one.

And I have learned my lesson. I am going to proofread each and every single chapter from here on out.

Hopefully a real chapter will follow today.

Good LORD I have some major issues with punctuation. Hopefully the rhythm of the story is improved. And I saw a great many times where I had meant to use not into a contraction and forgot it.

Length of Book One: 41k words without author's notes (8/24/10 - 8/25/10)

Chapter 18: Parallels and Echos

Being a Brief Interlude in Events and Occurring Slightly Outside of Time

Harry saw himself going through a set of traps, a giant three headed dog, a killer plant, a room full of flying keys, an oversized chess set, a knocked out troll, and a room with flames and potions. He was accompanied by a decent friend and a complete moron. At the end, he saw a mirror, and Quirrellmort. Harry saw himself do nothing while his enemy showed him his back, saw himself be used by his foe, and watched as he nearly died. All of it happen as an old man looked on, waiting for the very last moment to act.

He saw, in short, himself used and weakened. All to some purpose he couldn't understand. He then saw his night in the forest replayed, saw how it had paralleled the last part of the first vision, but instead had him showing his own strength, taking his own actions, fighting his own battle. He was growing stronger, and the only person who used him was himself.

He felt himself falling upward, up toward wakefulness, and he heard voices...

"... new voice. Wonder where this one came..."

"... the hell is this Black after..."

"... bet you 50 galleons that I am forced..."

"... since the last Inter-House War. And that was because the surviving instigators not only escaped punishment, but were..."

"... easy Leon, you can't tear her throat out. ... Why? We can't..."

"... reading it all year. It's the one of the journals of..."

"... sworn on my honor, this shall not..."

"... a useless weapon. What am I to do..."

He sat up in his bed wondering what the hell that was about.

A/N: And so, we begin book 2. Once more, my thanks to all the reviews. Summer is going to be two to three chapters long, I think.

And yes, I fully intended for the previous chapter to induce some confusion. It may all seem like chaos now, but it will make sense. Eventually. And taking the reviewer response to heart, from here on forth when I need do such a thing, it shall be tacked onto either the beginning or end of a chapter. No more chapter-ettes.

~Parseltongue~ : *Familiar Speech*

Chapter 19: The Snake and the Black Heir

Being Events in Complement to Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets

Harry had not gotten back to sleep that night. The dream that had awakened him, the dream that so completely confused him, any attempt to recall the details of it escaped him. He had tried every Occlumency trick he knew in recovering memories to try and find it, even asking Alistair, who had been more than happy to get out of the castle for the summer, for some help. They had come up with absolutely nothing.

All he had left of the dream were three impressions. One, he must avoid Dumbledore's manipulations at all costs. Two, he needed to be ready to face Voldemort on his own terms. The third however was far more nebulous. It just comprised solely of a feeling of... anticipation. It was impossible to describe any other way.

Finally giving it up as a bad job, and already being in his mindscape with Alistair, Harry decided it was time to work on his mental defenses. He had just finished putting everything he had spent the latter part of the year practicing into effect. The area between the curtain wall and the inner part of mind now resembled something out of an M.C. Escher painting. Alistair found it more than a little intimidating that an eleven year old could manage it.

The second aspect of light gray defense was to give the mind proverbial teeth and claws, to arm the mind with traps to further confuse, disorient, and cause some minor pain. Harry dove into this with a rather malicious glee, due to the fact that he saw it as something akin to his favorite past-time. The Hat watched as the

thought processes of a prankster were applied to the surreal space. Staircases that turned into slides, pitfalls into treacle, cannons that fired trout, and a large attack rubber ducky. And Harry was just getting started.

Alistair shuddered. He had always had a few doubts about Harry's sanity. He was certain now. It had taken a vacation to the arctic and never returned.

Before he went to breakfast the next morning, Harry had been working on a good chunk of his summer homework. He had gotten bored of trap making and needed something to do. The conversation around the table centered on a rather enlightening conversation.

Nicolas, between eating his pancakes and eggs, said, "There are two things you should know about the notice they hand out at the end of the school year regarding using magic at home. First is that any household where both parents are magical can apply for an exemption of the Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery. We've already gotten you one. This is one of the less apparent pureblood biased loopholes. Not many really know about it anymore."

Perenelle picked up the conversation while Nicolas ate his eggs, "Secondly, when there are enough wards around a property, such as where we currently are, the Ministry of Magic is incapable of tracking underage magic anyway. We got the exemption just to keep everything legal."

At end of breakfast, Nic also said, "Sirius told us he would be sending a letter along sometime this week, inviting you to stay with him for however long you want to this summer. The only reason he didn't invite you straight from the platform was that the renovations weren't quite complete yet. The choice is entirely yours, but he, unlike us, will actually have an active Floo connection."

Taking the dishes to the sink and using a charm to set them cleaning themselves, Harry said, "I'll think about it. At the very least, I'll wait until I get my work for the holidays done. I can't see myself getting it finished without interruptions every five minutes in the house of a Marauder."

Both Pen and Nic found this comment more than a little amusing.

Harry finished his homework the next day. Considering that he didn't want to be limited to the house and relatively small grounds of the Flamel property without having to rely on either of them or Hedwig for transportation, he told his guardians that he would be taking Sirius up on his offer. He then spent most of the time outside, either reading or flying.

He would have gladly maimed Malfoy for an obstacle course though. There was only so much circling in the air one could do. He was starting to get mildly bored, and more than a little stir crazy. But then again, he would have gladly maimed Malfoy. Period.

On Friday afternoon, lying on his back, staring at the clouds, Harry faintly heard something coming near him. He also felt a faint tug on his mind in the direction it was coming from. Hauling himself into a sitting position and turning toward it, Harry saw something moving along the grass.

He decided he would just let whatever it was know he knew it was there and said, "Hello?"

A snake reared its self up, looking in Harry's direction. It was a bright emerald green with black stripes. It bobbed its head excitedly, and set off in Harry's direction. When the snake got within five yards, he could 'hear' it, gleefully speaking, *Found you, found you! Why'd you have to be so far from where I was?*

Harry then said, teasingly, ~Why did you have to be so far from me?~

The snake reared up again, and said, aloud, ~You can speak my language?~

Harry nodded, and said, ~Yeah. Wasn't aware I was speaking it though. This is the only second time I've used it, though.~

~Awesome!~

Now that it was closer, Harry could see that it was four to five feet long and it had vivid yellow eyes. Moving once more towards Harry, it climbed up his arm, and coiled itself gently around his neck. ~Do you mind if I take a nap? I've been looking for you for weeks!~

~Sure, can I just ask two questions first?~

~Well, you already asked one, so what's a pair more?~

~Are you a she or a he, and what do I call you?~

~I am most definitely a female, and I don't have a name... We can talk about what to call me after I catch some zs.~

~Alright. Will it bug you if I get up and move around?~

~Not really... just try and be quiet...~

Walking into the house to get ready for lunch, Harry decided to start setting table. When Perenelle walked in and rather pointedly looked at the snake that had made herself comfortable on Harry's shoulders, he quirked his head to the side, and softly said, "She's apparently my second familiar... and she is sleeping."

Perenelle couldn't help but roll her eyes, but she started making the sandwiches they would be eating, and Harry helped. Ten minutes later, when Nic walked in, the first thing he said, "Why does Harry have a basilisk sleeping around his neck, and why are you so calm about it, Pen?"

"The answers your questions are, in order, because it is one of Harry's familiars, and it is currently asleep."

Harry chimed in, "She."

Pen rolled her eyes and deadpanned, "Of course Harry, we must not forget that the extremely deadly snake is a her."

Taking offense at that comment, he said, "I actually think she is quite sweet." He found the blank looks that the comment put on their faces to be quite amusing.

Nicolas then, quite calmly said, "He's been spending far too much time with Hagrid."

After her nap, Harry spent a while speaking with her (they had tried a couple names, but none of them fit), and found out she had been

hatched about three or so months ago and the place she had escaped from smelled like stale smoke and fermented liquor.

It appeared she wasn't entirely sure what she was either (she said she was a snake), and so while Harry was doing his research over the next day on basilisks, he ended up reading the passages aloud in Parseltongue. They found out that the 'killing stare' of a basilisk didn't develop until after two years of age, and that they had a set of 'eyelids' which blocked the power completely.

Which was how the cat got out of the bag about Harry's ability to talk to snakes. Nicolas asked just how long Harry had been aware of his ability to talk to snakes, to which Harry answered just over a year. Nicolas explained the prejudices that surrounded that particular power, and suggested Harry get it out in the open as soon as possible so that the public could at least get used to the idea.

By Tuesday, he'd written a few letters, but with the lack of post owls at the Flamels, and his reticence to ask Hedwig, Harry hadn't actually sent them yet. However, his thoughts were interrupted when Sirius poked his head into the room, and Padfoot had a slightly pained look on his face.

"If you didn't want to come to my place during the summer, you didn't have to ignore my letter."

"I haven't gotten your letter, Padfoot. Of course I want to come."

Blinking in surprise, Sirius sat down on the bed. "I sent it on Thursday. And I know that I am a part of the exception list on your mail rerouting..."

"God I hate fan-mail."

"Most of us don't have that problem Harry. And those who do, tend to at least read the fan-mail, not reroute it into a garbage dump. But have you gotten any letters so far this summer?"

Harry shook his head, and looked toward the phoenix that was rather studiously preening herself.

"Hedwig, would you mind making some rounds with mail? Something smells rotten in Denmark."

Of course Harry. I assume you'll want me to wait for the replies?

"Yes, please. No point in having you secure the delivery if the replies can get stolen."

Going over to the letters, he added a post script to each one noting the apparent theft of his mail, and gave Hedwig three letters to deliver, one for Neville, one for Hermione, and one for the twins.

Sirius clapped his hands together and said, "So with that taken care of, how about we get you packed and over to the house formerly known as Black."

Ten minutes later, Harry was standing across the street from a row of houses, his trunk at his feet, Isis, as they had finally decided her name would be, riding his shoulders. Sirius handed him a scrap of paper and told him to read it.

"Marauders' Manor is located at Number Twelve Grimmauld Place."

Sirius took the paper, burned it, and then told Harry to think about what he read. And when Harry did, a house appeared from between numbers eleven and thirteen.

Entering the house into a long hallway, Harry couldn't help but be reminded of the Gryffindor common room. Sirius then went on to give Harry the grand tour. He talked about how the house had been expanded as much as possible on the inside, and showed him the various sitting rooms, studies, dens, and recreational rooms. One of the last had what appeared to be a full bar. He showed Harry the massive formal dining room, the cozy informal one off the kitchen, and the massive kitchen, in which a pair of house-elves was busy making dinner. He showed Harry the dozen or so bedrooms, and then Harry's own suite of rooms, which was the second largest in the house, on the top floor, and right across the hall from Sirius's and next door to Remus's. He had his own study, sitting room, and bathroom.

The library was fairly large, and Sirius pointed out a door that led to where the books his family had been more... fond... of were stored. Harry was told that he would not have access to those Dark Arts books until after he turned seventeen.

Heading back down the stairs, Sirius pointed out a row of doors on the left hand side of the first floor. "Those are the training rooms. All except for the target range, which is the first door from the stairs to the ground, and the sparing room, which is the first from the stairs heading to the second floor, are going to remain locked until at least the summer after your third year. But I think the basement is going to more than make up for it."

And it did. They didn't take a set of stairs down. They took a lift. And the reason became apparent as soon as they cleared the ground floor. The basement had been turned into a cavernous space. The room was at least two hundred feet tall. The walls were painted to resemble the stands of a Quidditch stadium, and ceiling was enchanted paint that mimicked the sky, and the floor was actually grass. There was an actual, regulation size Quidditch pitch.

"Bloody hell, Sirius."

"I figured since my house was in the middle of London, my favorite seeker would need someplace to practice."

Harry just vacantly nodded as Sirius went on to explain how it had the obstacle course he would have mortally wounded Malfoy for. It had seven different configurations, each of which could be set for seven difficulty levels. And if Harry just felt like practicing his evasion techniques, there were a number of training bludgers, which did no more harm then being hit by a pillow. Everything was spelled to avoid or minimize injuries, with the walls, floor, ceiling, and obstacles being padded with cushioning and momentum dampening spells.

Harry was still speechless when Sirius led the way back to the lift, and the Marauder asked, "What's with the snake anyway?"

"She's my familiar."

"I thought Hedwig was your familiar."

"Isis is my second familiar."

"So she is a magical snake. What kind of magical snake is she?"

"Basilisk."

Sirius blinked several times, gulped rather loudly, and said, "She knows how to behave in a non-lethal manner doesn't she?"

"Of course she does."

"Good."

After dinner that night, Sirius motioned for Harry to stay after the table had been cleared. He had a rather somber look on his face. Harry was vaguely tempted to make some really bad puns revolving around the older man's name and animal form, but decided it would be juvenile. But he did speak first, "I have the feeling this isn't going to be a fun conversation, is it, Sirius?"

"No pup, it isn't. As you may well know, I am the last living male Black. Shortly after you were born, I had you declared my heir designate. It was the middle of the war, and I did not want what I did have going back to my family upon my death. The Blacks have been a notoriously Dark family for a couple centuries. Now while I was in prison, my mother passed before my father, and then in the short period of time between when she died and my father's passing, I was reinstated as the Heir to the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black, which was valid, as I was being held without trial. He did not want the family's inheritance to go to who it would default to. So that makes me Lord Black, as you will be Lord Potter on your seventeenth birthday. Follow me so far?"

Harry nodded, calmly making mental piles of information.

"And now there is a newly discovered side effect to constant long-term Dementor exposure. I am the last living male Black, and there will be no more Blacks when I am gone. The settlement I got out of the ministry for consigning a major house to extinction in the male line has paid for every last thing you have seen in this house, with the exception to the majority of books in the Library. And there was a fair bit left over. But that left as to who the Black family properties, positions, titles, and magics would fall to. It is built into all of those that they can only go to men who have Black blood, and that they must be able to trace back to the Black line through at most a great-grandparent. There are only two surviving people that apply. Draco Malfoy's mother was born a Black, and I think we can both agree that the Malfoys getting it is unacceptable."

Harry again nodded, knowing that Sirius was just taking his sweet time to state a simple fact.

"Then it is a good thing that I named the grandson of my great-aunt, Dorea Potter, nee Black, as my heir."

Harry rolled his eyes and said, "Did you really have to drag it out like that?"

"Of course. It wouldn't be fun otherwise. Which brings me around to the what we talked about concerning your hair at Christmas. One of the... abilities that shows up more often in the Black family and its descendants than in other families is the ability to alter their physical appearance, and those capable of it are called metamorphmagi. And on a related note, one of our cousins, and I will spare us both the insanity of trying to keep track of how far removed any of us are from the others, will be moving into the Manor next week to make it easier for her when she starts at the Auror Academy. She is also a metamorphmagus, and I've managed to bribe her into trying to teach you."

"Thanks Sirius, is there anything else you want to make overly complicated?"

"Not really. But let's see, I know I am forgetting something simple though... Oh yeah, the Floo connection is in the drawing room closest to the front door."

Harry picked himself up, and headed out the door and toward his room, saying, "Night, Sirius."

"Night, pup."

A/N2: The first person to guess who hatched Isis gets five house points. It'd be more but I think it is rather obvious. And yes, Number 12 is under a Fidelius. Who wouldn't be paranoid after a decade in prison?

Anyone who wants to argue the canon-ness of Harry's grandmother being Dorea, I say this. Alternate Universe. That is all. And there are a number of noted inconsistencies in the timeline that could validate it anyway.

Marauder's Manor has a basement, a ground floor, a first floor, a second floor, and a third floor. Isn't space expansion grand?

A/N: Thanks to all my wonderful reviewers. Which all of you have been. We've gotten over 20k unique hits!

Givetherabbitthefreakinrix was the first to guess correctly! Since it doesn't really matter all that much to the story in the long run, I will say that it was indeed Mundungus Fletcher who hatched Isis. Seriously, put a chicken egg under a toad in a dung pile. Wait a bit and the most deadly of snakes is born!

I've had an error sneak in. The number of reviews I've gotten got me to double check what I read. And it is indeed the male Basilisks that have the plumes. I've corrected the previous chapter to remove that detail.

Chapter 20: The Potter Library

Harry was woken up the next day by a bark, but he had stopped sleeping deeply several months ago. His hand whipped out from under his pillow while he bolted upright. In a matter of seconds there was a bang, a yip, and a crash.

"Bloody hell pup. That will teach me not to wake up someone who sleeps with their wand under their pillow... When did you start doing that anyway? I know for a fact that your holster was hanging from a bed post at Christmas. And why did you use a concussion spell anyways?"

"My paranoia kicked up a notch in April when I went for my second lifetime round with Voldemort. And it was the first one to spring to mind."

"Ahhh."

"So why were you trying to get me up Sirius?"

"Remus came in late last night, and I was wondering if you wanted to... greet... him?"

Harry's answering grin was all the response the old dog needed. After all, Harry still had to pay Moony back for his meddling.

Remus stumbled out of bed and towards his loo. Opening the door, a bucket dropped down on his head. It was filled with treacle. He vanished as much of the substance as he could, and then looked in the mirror. His hair was purple and his skin was canary yellow with neon pink polka dots. It was going to be a long summer.

"Why treacle, Harry?"

"Why not? But if you really must know, I like treacle. It is tasty, sticky, and a pain to clean up, even with magic."

And that kicked off a prank war that would last, on and off, for the rest of the summer. It was, during the opening days, Remus vs. Sirius, with both sides aided and abetted by Harry. Harry went to Diagon Alley after the first day, he just had to get his hands on a camera. Oh, this was going to make sure they both never did anything too drastic in the way of pranking to him. He then ordered a racing broom to be delivered in a week. While he was there, he also used a goodly portion of his saved up allowance to get the Twins belated birthday gifts.

Before the first true salvo of pranks flew after that opening shot, Harry got the replies from his letters. Apparently the Twins and Neville had already written to him, both with invitations to visit their homes at some point in the summer. Hermione had been waiting for Harry to send mail first, lacking an owl of her own. Harry made a mental note to go about setting up visits to his male friends.

However the first lull in the war was not too far away. In fact, it began on Friday, with the arrival of Tonks via the front door. The trapped front door. She was greeted by a large fresh trout that hit her square in the face. She was quite upset and started casting curses at the first person in sight.

Who just happened to be Harry. Dodging and diving into cover, the young Gryffindor screamed, "Pax! It wasn't me! I was all Remus's fault. I just wanted a picture of Padfoot getting hit by a large, smelly fish!"

The metamorph made a sound like an angry cat and said, "You'll have your peace if I get the film from that camera and your help with getting Remus back."

A roll of film was soon chucked out from where Harry was hiding. "I can get something done to Remus faster than two shakes of a lamb's tail!"

After lunch the next day, Remus was staring in horror at a mirror. Every stitch of clothing he was wearing was colored lilac and there were countless red hearts with 'R.L. + S.S.' in them. But the worst thing was his hair resembled what one would think the lovechild of a greasy haired git and the elder Malfoy would have had. He saw the flash and heard the click of a camera.

Blackmail was leveled against the two Marauders, and the first battle of the prank war ended with the victory going to the new, third side of Tonks and Harry.

Settling down in one of the sitting rooms the next day, Tonks put a serious expression on her face. "Sirius said that he suspected that you are a metamorphmagus, just like little old me. It is something that is very hard to learn, because it is magic done on an instinctual level. It took me years to gain full control of it.

"There are three levels of control metamorphs may be capable of. The first level, and the one that all metamorphmagi share, regardless of how strongly they have the gift, is what is commonly referred to as protein control. It includes control over the length, shape, and density of nails; the color, consistency, and length of all hair; the shape and color of the iris of the eyes; and skin tone.

"You are going to start with the nails on your hands. You can work on those without a mirror, and so work on them at any point you have the time. All I can explain is to will them to grow longer. This part of learning control will probably take the longest. You need to learn how to access the ability. Then you can learn how to control it. We won't be moving on to see if you have the next level of control until you perfect all aspects of this level. And I won't tutor you in anything else until you demonstrate the ability to make your nails grow. More than they naturally do anyway. That is all."

She got up and left. Harry shrugged and started what he knew would be the long process of accessing his dormant ability.

That evening Sirius took the lot of them to a Quidditch game, Puddlemere United vs. Wimbourne Wasps. Harry was ecstatic about

seeing his very first professional game, and watched raptly. He took mental notes on how the seekers played, getting a few ideas on how to improve his own style.

The next morning, Monday, Sirius tossed Harry a pair of sweatpants, a t-shirt, a light robe, and a pair of goggles. He then dragged Harry into the sparing room, and taught him a variation of the stinging hex that left splotches of color wherever there was a hit.

Half an hour later, both covered in a maddening amount of color, and more than a little, but Harry far more so than Sirius, the younger of the pair said, "Now just what was that about Sirius?"

"Have you gotten the letter your mother left for you to get last July?"

"Took until September to get it, and I couldn't stand to read it until a week or so later, but yes. And I came to the conclusion that whatever the prophecy is, it involves either me or Neville being the one to defeat the Voldemort. Or at least that is what the Dark Tosser and Dumbles believe. And one of us is going to be pressed into it. It's why I've taken to studying ahead."

"Okay then. What we just did is called a paint duel. Or as a good many muggleborns now call it, a paintball duel. It is one of the most basic instructional methods of teaching magical combat. This isn't about how most of the magical world views fighting with magic, where you trade spells against one another, shielding and countering. It is movement and volleys of magic. You and I are going to do this once a week for the rest of the summer."

At lunch, Remus asked, "Have you gone over the Potter properties Harry? Sirius spoke with me about how you plan on continually studying ahead, and I know for a fact that having access to the main property of your family will help."

In all honesty Harry had forgotten the small fact that he did indeed have access to all of his family properties. He smacked himself in the forehead. Of course, as if having mentioned this fact had summoned him, Lucky (Gringotts Secure Owl Number Thirteen) flew into the room and landed near Harry.

"Speak of the devil. Hey Lucky, how's business?", Harry asked as he pulled the letter from the owl's leg. He'd recently asked Griphook

for a list, if any, of what stakes Harry had in Quidditch teams. An elf unobtrusively delivered a bowl of water and an owl treat for Lucky, and a quill, parchment, and ink for Harry. He jotted out a quick note for the owl to return with, asking for Griphook to put together whatever information he could about the properties, and to get the family portkeys for them ready. And asking for an appointment to get them face to face, and mentioned the fact that he wanted to make a first run down to one of his other inherited vaults.

The next day, he got a reply back saying that an appointment could be made for Thursday at one.

Harry was waiting outside of Griphook's office staring at his hands, willing his nails to lengthen with no effect. He'd arrived thirty minutes early, said he would be ready for whenever Griphook had time for him, and for Griphook to take his time. Griphook had then come out five minutes later, handed Harry a folder and a wooden box, and asked if there was anything else he needed besides the vault run. Harry poked around the vault he had wanted to visit, removed a few things, and finished his business with the bank. Harry was in and out of Gringotts, and back at Marauders' Manor, in a little over an hour.

So the rest of his day found him going over the contents of the folder and what he remembered from the journal on the family information. His family had a few smaller homes, most of which were in one form or another of stasis, and had been so for at least two centuries. The one exception was the cottage at Godric's Hollow. It was in ruins. And from the records it had been both second in age, and in the strength of the wards, of all the properties.

First was the Potter Estate. The property had been in the family since time immemorial, and the current Manor there was five hundred years old. It was on more than a square mile of land, and was maintained by a staff of twenty house-elves. The journal of notes pointed that other journals about the history of the family, the full contents of the house and grounds, and what Harry would need to know about the family magics would all be in at the manor he would portkey into.

The box contained the family portkeys to all the properties, with directions of how to activate each one and how they could be attuned to him, and from there to any wards he was keyed into, by putting three drops of blood on them. The only one he took out was

the simple silver ring that acted for the Estate. He'd attuned it and then it had automatically sized for the index finger he put it on.

He went to sleep that night, ready to go to his ancestral home the next day.

Waking up around the same time he always did, he went down to catch an early breakfast from the elves. He then wrote a note, saying where he had gone, and left it on the table. Running his thumb along the ring, he said, "Be it ever so humble." He felt something like a fishhook jerk at his navel, and then drag him along a whirl of light and color, all while spinning. And then he was promptly dumped on his backside.

It reminded him of Floo travel. Spinning past fireplaces and being spit out to land painfully on the ground. He was starting to wonder if most forms of magical travel hated him. Or maybe he just hated magical travel.

Hauling himself to his feet and cursing, he looked around. The surroundings screamed wealth. He heard a pop and rounded on the noise his wand coming into his hand. And he found an elderly looking male house-elf that said, "Is it Master Harry?"

All he could do was nod dumbly.

"All of us house-elves have been wondering when you would finally come. I am Darda, the Head House-Elf. Feel free to ask me anything you want to."

And Harry did, asking about anything he could think about. The two levels below ground were used for storage. There were a number of parlors, sitting rooms, dining rooms, and other formal spaces on the ground floor. The first floor comprised of any spaces that guests might stay in, and also included the lowest floor of the library. He didn't ask too many details about the library yet. The third floor belonged solely for the use of the family, and was where the highest floor of the library was accessed. By that comment, he was able to conclude that the library had a great deal more space expansion than the rest of the house.

There were a half a dozen greenhouses, an acre of formal gardens, and a Quidditch pitch. The family (via the elves) raised both

hippogriffs and horses. Harry started to run out of questions about the Estate itself when the elf conducted him into an informal dining room on the third floor for lunch.

It was at that point that Harry asked about any journals or notes his father had left for him. While lunch was being set out, the elf popped away for a few moments and returned with three plain brown leather-bound books. There was simple black lettering on the front of each of them. They were titled, Estate, History, and Magics.

Picking up the one on History, he opened it and a letter fell out. He read it as he ate. It gave an extremely brief history of the family, and stated that the journal was actually an Anybook linked to a shelf that contained the personal journals of all the previous Lord Potters from when they took up the title until they passed. It went on to detail that an Anybook was simply a book enchanted to be able to access any book on the specially enchanted shelf it is linked to. And it also mentioned that with the one exception of this, the family had something far more useful than Anybooks.

He set this 'journal' aside for later, knowing that it would be a major endeavor to read. 'Magics' was next and another letter came out of it. It talked about how most of the older families had special spell books that contained magics created by and for the family. They were most commonly referred to as a family book of shadows. Harry's father said that while the magics protecting the Potter family book of shadows would normally stop him from using it until after he turned seventeen, James had set it so he could use it by fourteen, with the hopes that Harry would avoid using it until at least after he finished his O.W.L.s. The Potters also kept what they referred to as a grimoire for younger members that both detailed passive family enchantments that they could make use of and a few minor tips and tricks that they would be able use effectively. That was what this book was.

Opening the book, the very first section was on the enchantments surrounding the Potter Family Library. Deciding to hold off on the magics around and about the library, he opened the estate book and looked for the more mundane information on it.

An hour later, after having reread the section twice, Harry was flabbergasted. The elves had two standing budgets of ten thousand galleons a year for newly printed books, one for each mundane and

magical books. Their rare book budget was ten times that. For both worlds. The library here put a good many of the known collections to shame. In both worlds. One of the few contenders was the one at Hogwarts, and the family was of the opinion that the two were at the very least equal. And only in the magical world. It was the premiere collection of the written word if the mundane world knew about it.

He then turned to the grimoire to see what enchantments the library used that made the use of Anybooks, which he thought sounded extremely useful, pointless. And he found out exactly why the family went to such lengths to enlarge the contents of the Library.

Most established families with large book collections made use of magically self-updating master ledgers to keep track of what they have. The most complex of these can both direct users to the books they are looking for, and list the books by category. They also tended to make use of Anybooks to make handling the books easier, giving each member of the family at least their own personal Anybook and shelf.

The Potters took these two bits of magic to the most logical, and insane, conclusion. The library was itself a massive Anybook shelf. The magic was however far too complex and powerful for the master ledger of the system to display the actual text of the books. Instead it could be used connect to specially crafted 'linking books' to, for example, the entirety of the library's transfiguration texts.

The magics involved also had a very advanced method of searching through the books. Take the transfiguration linked book from before. If one wanted to, they could simply have it list all texts that would be in the skill level of, for example, a fourth year student.

And to top it all off, the master ledger and linking books did not even have to be in the library to work.

Harry's rational mind decided to shut down for a good half an hour after he finished reading about this. Then he called for Darda and had the elf take him to the library. He asked the elf to point him to the master ledger and linking books, and to get him a trunk... or something, he didn't really have a coherent plan at this point. Hell he didn't even have anything that remotely resembled a coherent thought.

When the elf came back, he found Harry fondling the master ledger and drooling. Harry then packed up what he wanted, chiefly the master ledger and three dozen blank linking books, threw in the three books about the family he had gotten for good measure, shrunk the chest and pocketed it. He then asked Dada if the elf thought there was anything he should know or see to, who replied that the elves had everything well in hand. He told them to write him if they needed him for anything, but to have the letters delivered as securely as possible, as someone had apparently been stealing his unsecured mail.

He then rubbed the ring, and finished, "There's no place like home." And the portkey took him back to Marauders' Manor.

A/N2: Yes, I made it seem like the entire Potter family are rather insane when it comes to books. Deal with it.

A/N: Thanks for all the reviews. I appreciate the feedback. Not sure how long the events of this book are going to take to unfold. But the basilisk and diary are not going to go down quickly or without a fight. School starts back up next chapter. 75k+ hits; 25k+ visitors!

Chapter 21: Summer Fun

Harry spent the next couple of days either with his new favorite objects in the universe or attempting to bring his metamorph abilities to the surface. Of course the peace wasn't meant to last all too long. Someone spiked dinner one night with enough hot sauce to ignite a forest. And everyone appeared to think someone else was to blame.

Harry suspected one of the elves had a sense of humor.

For the remained of June, and the first two weeks of July, the Manor remained in a state of war. Every scrap of clothing was eventually charmed in some embarrassing manner, no one would eat anything served in the house, and doors were opened with extreme caution. Harry still managed to get into paint duels with at least two separate residents a week and Sirius took everyone to a Quidditch match once a week. But the constant pranking was beginning to wear on Harry's last nerve. He may not have started it, but he was going to finish it.

Three people came back to consciousness to the sound of an air horn. That and the fact they were apparently attached to the ceiling. Sirius, Remus, and Tonks were all very confused about just how they had gotten there. Who had put them there was more than obvious. Harry was standing underneath them, and he had a rather irritated look on his face. He was absently petting the basilisk that was draped around his shoulders. Even though he had assured all of them that she wouldn't hurt a fly, it was still pretty damned creepy. And Harry knew that.

"Good, everyone is awake. This has carried on far too long. It was fun to start with, but I had to go out yesterday in the last of the clothes I had that would let me go into the muggle world without breaking the statute of secrecy, in order to get more clothes. I had to willingly go shopping for clothing. I cannot read for more than fifteen minutes without something exploding somewhere in the building.

And the training bludgers are still singing off color limericks. It has been a bloody fortnight since that one was pulled off. Enough is enough. I have proven that I can get all three of you at once. With ease. The prank war ends here and now, or the kid gloves come off. I have made arrangements to spend the week with Neville and I leave today. In fact, I am supposed to be Flooing over now. I bid you all good day, and wish you a good week. The superglue will dissolve in about fifteen minutes; the floor has a cushioning charm."

The week Harry had spent with Neville was one of the more relaxing of the summer. Sure for the first couple days they had mostly focused on finishing up and polishing Neville's homework and spending a good number of hours in the Longbottom greenhouses. But Harry enjoyed helping his friend, and he had finally started to get past the associations he had that connected Herbology with the memories of backbreaking labor in his aunt's garden.

Harry then introduced his best friend and comrade-in-arms to paint duels on the third day. It became a daily occurrence between the pair for the rest of the week, and they made the decision that they would have sessions once a week during the school year.

They also had a number of conversations about pureblood culture, continuations of talks that the pair had had during the school year. Harry had spoken with Sirius a number of times, and was finally starting to get a handle on how much information he had been deprived of by growing up with his now imprisoned relatives.

The pair also spent an hour or so in the air each day, Harry giving Neville a few pointers here and there to bolster his confidence. At the end of the week, Harry left Neville saying that if he wanted to come over to the Marauders' Manor each Friday at noon for a paint duel, he was more than welcome. Harry was told that he was invited to Neville's birthday party on the 30th.

Harry made his exit from the Longbottom ancestral home at about noon.

Hauling himself off the floor after being thrown out of the Floo, Harry poked his head into the dining room, figuring it was around about lunch time. Everyone was seated around the table, just about to

start lunch, and he said, "Hello residents of Marauders' Manor. Are we all still at war?"

Everyone looked at him, and they all had varying degrees of consternation on their faces. Tonks was the one who broke the silence, "Why'd you glue me to the ceiling alongside these miscreants? They were the source of most of the chaos..."

"Because, Tonks, I wanted to get the point across to everyone all at once, and besides which, you were the one that did the last batch of charms on my clothing. I was irritated."

She looked appropriately shame-faced at this.

Remus and Sirius shared a look, and then Remus said, "There hasn't been a prank played since you left a week ago, and everything has been put back to normal. You hungry cub?"

"Starved."

From then until Neville's birthday, things remained fairly quiet. Harry had set up linking books for all of his classes and was working through 'books equivalent to, or in supplement of, second year'. He also took a couple hours a day to fly in the basement, sometimes using the obstacle course, but mostly he spent the time dodging increasing amounts of bludgers. He was up to four after him constantly by the 30th. He had continued to use Hedwig to securely deliver his mail, though continued to feel bad about it until she explained to him that she needed an excuse to fly around, and he was giving it to her.

He'd also noticed something, and was finally disturbed enough to bring it to the attention of Alistair.

"Al, I've been sleeping less and less each night. It started at the beginning of summer, and I started keeping track two weeks ago. In the past six days, I've only slept four hours a night."

"I was wondering both when it would start to manifest and when you would start to notice. One of the key reasons that any organic being needs sleep is because it must rest. Different beings need different amounts of rest, and for different purposes. A wizard or witch needs rest for body, mind, and magic. Occlumency, in its use of calmly

sorting through memories and peacefully examining the defenses achieves that rest, while also restoring it with magic. That leaves you only needing rest for your body and magic. A number of master Occlumens have been known to only need an hour or two of sleep a night."

"And you didn't tell me this why?"

"Didn't know whether or not you would get to the point you would need to know."

"Ahh... Now that it has leveled off..."

"It could still decrease. You haven't finished learning Occlumency and you are still a growing young man."

"Damn."

Waiting in the sitting room to use the Floo for the eleven o'clock start time of Neville's party, which was a good hour away still, so Harry was once more working on willing his fingernails to grow. And they shot forward a noticeable amount. Slipping into his mindscape and recalling the memory, he replayed it over and over again, trying to figure out just how he had managed it. He then noticed a peculiar tingling in what could only be described as his magic when he managed it.

Going back out into the world, Harry focused on calling up that tingling into his fingers and when he finally managed it, willed his fingernails to be an inch longer than normal. And he succeeded! There was pandemonium in the sitting room as he howled his head off in joy. Which of course brought everyone running, wondering what the yelling was for. And he showed them, he had finally managed it.

Everyone except for Tonks congratulated him, who asked, "It's well it good to be able to make them longer, but can you put them back?"

He still took five minutes to get to the point where he could control it, but he did manage to fix his nails without clipping them.

Tonks then said, "Good, now for lesson the second. Be able to do that within a matter of seconds, if not completely and totally spontaneously."

Harry decided to kill the rest of the time until Neville's party by reading, deciding he'd practice speeding up the process later.

Neville's party was a small quiet affair. The twins and Hermione were there, and they generally got him gifts regarding plants and Herbology, due to the fact that he really seemed to love it. Harry made a mental note that he should probably get a hobby in addition to flying around like a maniac.

They spent the rest of the party talking about their summers so far, with Harry's being one of the more eventful. He kept the results of his library visit to himself for now, if only for the fact he didn't have the books with them, and the magic surrounding the books made it impossible for non-Potters to use them. He had been rather upset at that point, and the book explaining the magics didn't mention any way to make exceptions. Hermione was not going to be pleased that unfettered access to a library on par with Hogwarts's could be within arms length but untouchable.

Neville gave them a tour of Longbottom Manor and its grounds before everyone started to leave, with the twins saying that their mother had agreed to Harry going to their home for a week starting the day after his birthday.

Harry spent most of the first half of his birthday practicing his metamorph abilities, but there was only a barely noticeable increase in speed. Dragging himself out of his room for lunch, he opened the door to the dining room and heard, "Surprise!"

He had his wand out and flicked out a stunner in the direction of the party before the word was finished. Everyone hit the ground, a few people yelping in surprise.

Sirius was the first to get up and said, "Okay, new rule, no one surprises Harry in any way, shape, or form. At least he didn't use a concussion spell this time."

After the rather unexpected reaction to the party, things took a little while to get back to normal. They had cake, opened presents, and

then went into one of the larger rec-rooms and played billiards and darts. A good while before everyone left, the extensive tour of the magically expanded building began. The Twins were drooling at the indoor Quidditch Pitch, Hermione drooled at the Black Library, and Neville was in awe of the sheer amount of space.

All in all the first birthday party that Harry could remember was fairly awesome.

And the next day, he was at the Weasley home, better known as the Burrow. He was going to be staying in the twins' room on a cot. Alistair had decided to tag along to visit two of his more favorite pranksters.

"Okay, Fred, George, I know what you told everyone you have been up to when Hermione has been present, but what have you really been doing this summer to keep busy?"

"It is really..."

"... quite simple, Harrykins. We've..."

"... been inventing. With..."

"... potions."

And at the mention of that, and noticing the more than prevalent burn and concussive force damage to the room, Alistair quickly morphed into an M1 helmet. They then spent the next week making some rather startling discoveries in the field of prank potions and blowing themselves up. The three found it all to be jolly good fun.

One thing Harry found out that he had never known about was that someone had been writing ridiculous fiction about him and his childhood. He found this out because, apparently, the twins' little sister was a rather rabid fan of his. He made a note to keep his distance from her until she got over it. Hopefully she would get over it. Harry could not abide the thought of having a stalker.

He made a note to have Griphook investigate this. If someone was making obscene amounts of money off of his name and image, he wanted to put a stop to it. He hated his fame with a passion. Besides which, he wanted his cut.

The Weasleys' received their Hogwarts letters while he was there, and planned on going to the Alley the next Wednesday. Harry said he and Sirius would be going on that Monday. Harry, having had a bang up (or is that blow up) week, returned to the Marauders' Manor in high spirits.

That Monday, Harry and Sirius went school shopping. However before that, the Marauder invited his heir into a meeting with the Black Account Manager, Ripclaw. The meeting centered around a plan that Sirius had devised that would impoverish both the Malfoys and the Lestranges. All debts had been bought up for both families and the dissolution of both Lucius's marriage to Narcissa and Rodolphus's to Bellatrix had been set in motion, along with the return of both dowries. With interest. And when the seats on both the legislative and judicial portions of the Wizengamot, along with whatever seats on the Hogwarts Board of Governors, went on sale to attempt solvency, they would be bought up by the Black family. Sirius drew the line at expelling both his cousins from the family.

And it would all start to take place Thursday.

The rest of the day shopping in the Alley was quite uneventful. They missed a book signing that would occur later in the week, but then again that was the point. Shopping was much easier when you don't have a crowd of witches drooling over some dandy. The disturbing thing was that whoever had written out and approved the booklist had a good many of this dandy's books on it!

Harry knew that this could not end well.

The rest of the summer passed quietly, and with a minimum of pranking. Harry had gone though a very good portion of what the linking books were saying was second year level information, and now any text he brought up was just repeating what he had read before. He decided he would keep it up for the first month or so of school, and then he would move on to third year level stuff.

He'd also finally finished learning how to control his nails in a matter of seconds. Tonks had told him to start working on his hair. She was sure he'd figure it out. He decided he'd see what books he had access to concerning metamorphmagi, because Tonks was a terrible teacher.

Soon enough he found himself to be one of the first on the platform, and taking his compartment of choice, the last one on the last car, he settled in to wait for his friends.

A/N2: Doing a little bit of digging, I figured the date of the canon Diagon Alley visit was Wednesday the 12th of August. Harry, having been rescued by the Weasleys three days after his birthday, is then told in a letter from Hermione that she is going to be in London next Wednesday, which would put it on the aforementioned date. The ruination of the Malfoy family occurs on the second Thursday of that month, just one day AFTER the Weasleys' go to Diagon Alley. The Diary is in play.

A/N: Thanks to the reviewers. In my personal opinion, the plot device of automatic magical bonding is a bit over used. While I may explore the concept in other stories, I will not be doing it in this one. At least that is what I think is the plan for now.

For those who were wondering why Dobby never showed up to say that Harry shouldn't go back to Hogwarts, he spent the vast majority of his time in a household that had a good number of elves. Do you think they'd allow some strange elf access to one of their family?

Oh, and unless someone is willing to volunteer one (I will give credit where credit is due), I am not going to even try writing a sorting hat song. It would be a disaster. I may very well go back and put first year's in there if I end up having songs for all years. I was just being more than a little lazy when I did that chapter.

Chapter 22: Return to Hogwarts

Harry was calmly staring into space, idly practicing his ability to recall facts and memories without going down into his mindscape. He'd already put his school uniform on, in fact he did it at the Manor, since Sirius had apparated them directly onto the platform. Alistair had asked Remus to take him to the school, so Harry was completely without companionship at the moment.

But then again, he still tended to prefer solitude. He closed his eyes and started going through what he had read in the past month from a linking book that was attuned to 'Learning Languages'. It seemed any halfway decent text in the magical world that taught a language included audio.

He enjoyed just being with his thoughts. And he really loved magic.

He continued with those mental exercises for a good fifteen minutes, before he was dragged out of his thoughts by someone entering the compartment and sitting down. Opening his eyes, he saw that a girl he didn't know, a blond girl with large gray eyes, had joined him.

She looked a little odd, but he got a similar vibe he had gotten off of Neville and Hermione. He could tell that she was a bit of an outcast like them, and like him. That thought running through his head, he decided to try and be nice to her.

So, he gently asked, "First year?"

She nodded. So he held out his hand and said, "I'm Harry."

She looked at the hand and shook it. "Luna Lovegood."

He wondered briefly why she had picked this compartment, but shrugged it off. "Any idea about what house you might end up in?"

She shook her head.

"I'll tell you a secret. The hat will offer you a choice if you have the traits of more than one house, so you may very well get to choose."

She nodded at that.

"I may only be a second year, but if you have any questions, ask me. I'll answer if I can..."

She smiled weakly, "Thank you."

"Now, if you don't have anything you want to talk about, I'm going to do some thinking..."

"Occlumency is a very useful thing. I was taught it when I was younger, but I never progressed very far beyond the basics. By the way I like your familiars."

Harry thought that she must be particularly observant. He liked observant people. He nodded and slipped back into thinking about languages.

The next person to join them was Neville, and he was a little unsettled at the strange blond who was reading an upside down magazine.

He stared for a moment, shrugged, and sat down next to Harry. He introduced himself to Luna, and found out that she was reading the Quibbler. Nev hit Harry on the shoulder, passed the raven haired

one a deck of cards (which he took and started shuffling), and asked Luna if she wanted to join in a game of exploding snap.

Hermione found the three of them there twenty minutes before the train was scheduled to leave, in the middle of a game. She asked to be dealt in the next game.

The twins checked in on them minutes before departure.

Harry wondered when the Ferret would make his appearance. He would end up waiting until half an hour before they arrived at the station.

"Hey, Scarhead!"

Harry just looked up from his (winning) hand and said, "Yes, O Scion of Malfoy?"

The blond ponce blinked for several seconds before pushing onward.

"I heard you spent the summer with a convict and a teacher, couldn't have been much fun."

Harry tilted his head to one side and just stared at Malfoy for a minute, and then said, "The Heir of Black wonders just how much money the Malfoy Family has left after my Lord pauperized them..."

Malfoy turned as white as a sheet, spun on his heel, and fled back up the train. Harry then proceeded to win the game.

Neville, a bit wide eyed, said, "Did your godfather really do that to the Malfoys?"

All he got from Harry for a few minutes was an evil grin. "Technically, yes. They went from having a net worth of several tens of millions down to a few hundred thousand. And all of it is liquid. They lost the manor, they lost their heirlooms, they lost everything. Sirius really wanted all of their seats on the Wizengamot, and the Black family has never taken enough of an interest in Hogwarts before to get a seat on the Board of Governors. The only reason they still have any money is that Sirius told his banker to get those no matter what.

"Given how the Malfoys tend to run through money, they stand even odds of bankrupting themselves."

Neville shook his head, "Only one of the Marauders' would play an expensive prank on the Malfoys using the banking system."

Following the crowd of students to a set of carriages, Harry wondered just what the sinister animals pulling the carriages were. He'd ask Hagrid the next time he had tea with the large man.

He climbed in with his two friends and were joined by the Twins and Lee Jordan. The ride up the the castle was quiet and peaceful. They made their way up to, and then into, the Castle, and took their seats in the Great Hall at the Gryffindor Table.

And then Harry saw the ponce that was on the back of every one of their so called defense texts. He had hoped it would just be one of the man's more rabid fans. Harry made a mental note that DADA may become the new naptime. Neville and Hermione were sitting across the table from him, but for some reason no one was taking the seats either side of him. It could have had something to do with the snake that absolutely refused to be anywhere other than around his neck.

He watched as McGonagall (he really had to come up with some shorted form of her name to refer to her in his head at least, it was such a mouthful), led the new first years into the hall and as she set Alistair onto the stool. He only paid cursory attention as he sang his little tune.

(Sing a little song in your head

have it describe all the traits of the houses

god knows I am crap at song writing myself

let the sorting begin.)

With that being done, he watched the sorting, putting names to faces, and only really concerned about two of those who were to be sorted. A fellow outcast who he would try and help no matter what

house she ended up in, and a potential stalker that Harry hoped would end up in any other house but his own. Maybe some distance would help get her over her hero worship.

"Lovegood, Luna."

"GRYFFINDOR!"

The blonde came to the table and took the seat to Harry's left, a far away look her eyes.

"Weasley, Ginerva."

"RAVENCLAW!"

Harry made a note to thank Alistair.

Dumbledore started the feast with a few (insane) words.

'And my friends call me crazy.'

Afterwards the Head made notes that the Forbidden Forest was just that, forbidden, magic was not allowed in the halls, and Filch was a complete and total git.

Harry decided to accompany the first years on whatever path the fifth year prefects decided would be most (amusingly) helpful to the first years in getting to the Tower. Harry made a note to write out Luna a list of short cuts and routes.

Getting his schedule the next day he saw that Mondays and Thursdays were loaded with classes, Tuesdays and Fridays were light days, and Wednesdays were in between. And today was a Wednesday. A free period and then...

"Bloody hell. The Great Blonde Dandy is my first class."

There was little doubt to whom Harry was referring to, and so he got a mild death glare from all females within earshot. Save Luna. That raised his already high opinion of the young girl.

That didn't help as Harry endured a double period where the man first gave a test all about himself (which Hermione got perfect and Harry used as a chance to insult the ponce) and then the dandy set loose a swarm of Cornish Pixies. Everyone except Harry dove for cover. Harry raised his wand and set loose a stream of fire to crisp half a dozen pixies to get their attention, and then he blasted open a window.

"Out! Get out you little blighters, or you will end up roasted like your friends!"

They fled out the window.

That event, combined with the fact that his new familiar was a deadly snake, had everyone giving Harry a wide berth through the halls of the school. Harry didn't care, the Gryffindors' by and large didn't care about their star seeker's peculiarities, and the few Hufflepuffs he had managed to make friends with were calmed by the fact that Isis seemed so docile. He couldn't find it in himself care about what the rest of the school thought.

The rest of the first week passed, Harry only answering questions in class when Hermione couldn't, and the both of them giving Neville a chance to earn some points outside of Herbology. They had decided on this path the first day, Harry out of laziness, Hermione wanting to see how good Neville was.

Potions was like always, Snape doing the absolute minimum necessary to remain on the teaching staff, and apart from DADA, the other classes were all fairly good, if the theory was a repeat of what Harry already knew. Harry had kept his practical work that he was ahead on to only enough attempts to get the spells right, leaving perfecting them for class.

Then the weekend rolled around.

Harry was, as always among the first of the students to breakfast, especially on weekends. Sitting down at the Gryffindor table, Lucky landed in front of him. Griphook had informed Harry that there had never been any royalties from the use of his name and image, and

that he had begun an investigation into this theft (one of the worst things you could call a goblin was a thief). And so Harry knew how seriously Goblins took theft of any scale, but at amounts of money involved, heads would roll. Literally. And Harry (by way of his guardians) had written a letter saying that the goblins could deal with this however they saw fit.

Which meant that when whoever it was got arrested by the DMLE, they would immediately (or soon after) be turned over to the untender mercies of the Goblin Justice System.

Opening the letter and reading it, Harry got an evil grin. An extremely evil grin. If anyone of the House of the Brave had seen that grin directed at them, they would run screaming, looking for the nearest, most secure hiding place.

The letter also included references to evidence that showed that the person behind the books about him was guilty of a hell of a lot more.

Griphook also forwarded the fact that the warrant for arrest would be executed on Monday, at one in the afternoon. The Prophet would be given all the relevant information and press releases in time for an evening special edition.

Wood, in all of his insanity, started the first Quidditch practice at an ungodly hour of the morning on the Sunday of the first weekend. If it hadn't been for the fact that Harry had already been awake for half an hour, he would have felt honor bound to hex his captain. As it was he wanted to try out his new Nimbus 2001 on the field in an actual practice. He had gotten plenty of use from it over the summer, but wanted to actually show off a little.

But Wood took several hours to explain tactics to a team that was by and large still asleep. Harry idly thought about stunning him and getting Madam Pomfrey to check Oliver for possessing spirits... or maybe insane gods of competition and Quidditch.

Harry was leaning back, just having finished eating Lunch. He remembered the chat he had yesterday about the thestral herd, how only people who had seen death could see those magical creatures.

He was a little miffed that Hogwarts had decided to make use of creatures that most couldn't see to provide the bulk of transportation for their students to and from the station.

Carriages that move without apparent pulling animals is just bloody overkill in the showmanship department.

He cast the occasional glance at his watch, and waited. It seemed that however much Fate hated him (and his first eleven years of life and the events of last April were good evidence), she was capable of tossing him the occasional bone.

And speaking of Bones, the Director of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement was walking into the Great Hall at the stroke of one, on the button. Flanked by two Aurors and with a third on her heels, she advanced on the Head Table. Harry wished he had popcorn... and then blinked as a bucket materialized in front of him. Damn the house elves of Hogwarts did good work.

Not one to look a gift horse in the mouth, Harry started munching as Bones unrolled a scroll, and stated in a voice that carried through out the Hall, "Gilderoy Lockhart, you are hereby under arrest for countless charges of gross fraud, gross theft, and gross abuse of memory charms. You will be tried for all of the crimes you have broken under wizarding law, and then turned over to the Goblin Nation for a number of charges involving theft from a most valued client."

Five minutes later the Aurors were levitating the unconscious body of Lockhart out of the castle. The idiot had gone for his wand and been stunned immediately. Harry just watched on in amusement, eating popcorn. You couldn't pay for entertainment like this.

The evening edition of the Prophet had told how the trial of Lockhart had ended with a very quickly delivered sentence of guilty, and that he was quickly turned over to the Goblins. Harry got a letter next morning that Lockhart's head was adorning a pike in a chamber that the Goblin Nation kept as a warning to thieves.

School continued with a reasonable amount of peace. A week after Lockhart's arrest, disgrace, and disappearance into the Goblin

justice system, McGonagall managed to get the DMLE to loan Hogwarts another Auror for this school year. A fellow by the name of Dawlish. A really rather unimpressive fellow, even if he knew things as well as any other Auror. The classes, though informative, were lackluster. Harry took to going over everything he had already learned from DADA books during these times.

However to the thanks of all students, a mass refund of the Lockhart books was organized by the school, and with cost of those 'books' was returned to the students, minus the cost of real course books.

The rest of the classes were as enjoyable as ever, with Herbology finally becoming enjoyable for Harry. Moony's classes continued to be some of the most fun anyone had, especially when he started having reenactments. Harry avoided participating in those. He could do meek, unimpressive, and unnoticeable, but when it came to actual acting, he wasn't all that good.

Snape was still a git, McGonagall was stern, and Flitwick bubbly. Life went on.

The first match of the year was Slytherin vs. Hufflepuff, and much to Harry's surprise and pleasure, the badgers steamrolled right over the snakes. The random fifth year seeker was nothing compared to the Puffs seeker, Cedric Diggory. Then followed the lead up to Halloween. Most of the residents learned that Harry was not in a good mood in the lead up to that holiday.

Shortly after the match, Harry was approached by Nicolas the Gryffindor House ghost with an invitation to his deathday party on Halloween. The look Harry shot the spirit sent him fleeing in terror.

After classes and dinner on Friday the thirtieth, Harry went down to the kitchens to arrange a basket of food that would stay fresh and last him through the day tomorrow. He told his friends he would be fine, and to just enjoy themselves. He just wanted to be alone tomorrow, and since it was a Saturday, he could do just that. Wood had even booked the pitch for practice on Sunday instead of Saturday.

And so it was Harry was enjoying the solitude to get a great big jump on third year reading focusing on all the electives, though he would not be taking Muggle Studies, when Mrs. Norris was attacked.

A/N2: Yes, Harry can see the Thestrals. He can remember the Halloween. So he has seen Death, in the form of his mother being murdered.

Lockhart will never darken my story again.

This year's schedule for Harry and co.

Monday

9am – Potions w/Slytherin :: 10am – Potions w/Slytherin :: 11am – Charms :: 12pm – Free

2pm – Transfiguration w/Ravenclaw :: 3pm – Transfiguration w/Ravenclaw :: 4pm – Herbology :: 5pm – Free

Tuesday

9am – DADA :: 10am – Free :: 11am – History w/Hufflepuff :: 12pm – History w/Hufflepuff

2pm – Free :: 3pm – Free :: 4pm – Free :: 5pm – Herbology

Wednesday

9am – Free :: 10am – DADA w/Ravenclaw :: 11am – DADA w/Ravenclaw :: 12pm – Transfiguration

2pm – Free :: 3pm – History :: 4pm – Free :: 5pm – Charms

Thursday

9am – Charms w/Hufflepuff :: 10am – Charms w/Hufflepuff :: 11am – Free :: 12pm – Herbology

2pm – Free :: 3pm – Potions w/Slytherin :: 4pm – Potions w/Slytherin :: 5pm – Transfiguration

Friday

9am – DADA :: 10am – Free :: 11am – History :: 12pm – Free

2pm – Herbology :: 3pm – Free :: 4pm – Free :: 5pm – Free

12am :: Astronomy (lets out at 2am)

So it got a little lopsided. First year ended up looking so ordered and even by accident.

A/N: Once more, and as always, my thanks to the reviewers. I read each and every one, and they all give me a warm little glow, and I think that is at least part of why I feel compelled to keep getting updates out as quickly as I do. Thank you all.

Year two is not going to be anywhere near as long as year one was. I'm thinking two, probably three chapters will see the year done. Including this one. Can't really think of much to do with this year. I think year three will be better in terms of how much will happen. Year four is where I hope it will really get good.

Chapter 23: The Chamber Opens

Harry, in a fit of premeditated laziness, refused to even open his eyes until after ten in the morning. He just didn't feel like facing the day yet. It was a Sunday, and it was the day after the anniversary of his parents' murder, and he was entitled to it once or twice a year. Of course, he would have stayed in bed longer, but Alistair could really be an annoying git.

"Harry, we need to talk. It is urgent."

The boy in mention responded from beneath a pillow, "Define urgent."

"Someone has opened Salazar Slytherin's personal section of Hogwarts and let loose a thousand year old basilisk that is probably of questionable sanity having been locked in a dank subbasement for most of its existence."

Bolting upright, he said, "Bugger."

"Indeed."

"And you need to tell me this because?"

"We, that is Hogwarts and I, are of limited power in this instance. The basilisk is part of Salazar's own personal safe guards when it comes to the protection of the school and it's students, and so it is beyond any function of magic available to us to bring it to heel. But

most importantly was the person Hogwarts and I most suspected of opening it fifty years ago. One Tom Marvolo Riddle."

"Or better known as Lord Voldemort. Double bugger."

"Very much so. Tom was a descendant of Salazar, but he never sought recognition by the Castle nor the Goblins, and so he was extremely limited in what he was capable of in that capacity."

"So what makes the two of you so sure that it has anything to do with him this time?"

Harry then had the honor of Hogwarts herself answering the question, "Because, I can sense an artifact of some of the most vile magics I have ever encountered roaming with my walls. It is so bound with concealment and misdirection magics that I cannot locate it, or the person who is in possession of it. Its energies, however, are known to me."

Harry shook his head at this and said, "Those energies being of Voldemort. Shite. And I have the feeling that the 'possession' of the object is a two way street. That monster seems overly fond of magics that let him joyride in other peoples' bodies. This is not going to end well. Who's dead?"

Alistair responded now, "No one has died yet, but Mrs. Norris was petrified last night."

Harry thought for a moment, working through his store of knowledge on that particular beast, and having his own spurring his research, he said, "Reduction of power due to non-direct eye contact. Okay. Do we start telling people left, right, and center and probably cause a panic, or do we take things easy for now?"

"We don't need to take drastic action yet, but if things proceed like last time, there will be at least one death before the end of May."

"Damn. Who died last time?"

"Myrtle Martlebee. In fact she still resides in the castle. As a ghost."

"Could be useful later. And where is Salazar's personal area of the castle."

"We don't know. He was a secretive man, and he removed it, and all the functions pertaining to it, from the central wards of Hogwarts and never gave the information to me."

"Damn."

"It gets worse. There was a message left in some red substance with the cat's petrified body. 'The Chamber of Secrets Has Been Opened. Enemies of the Heir Beware.' And given your latest familiar, people are making unkind assumptions..."

"Hell. And because I am going to be working against the force behind this, I cannot make a magically binding oath thorough enough to kill the gossip. Damn. Any other bad news?"

"Yup, all of Hagrid's roosters were killed yesterday. So an easy kill of the incredibly old mythical beast is out."

"Any good news, Al?"

"Nope."

Harry started cursing, in several different languages. And then he, the hat, and the castle got down to planning.

Harry slumped down into the common room, with his bag over one arm. He kept his linking books in there, not that he would need them for most of the subject matter he would have to research. Looking around, and spotting his favorite yearmates, he went to sit with them. Before he had even settled, he had put up half a dozen privacy spells. He then quickly and thoroughly updated them on what he had just been told.

The first word and only one, before Alistair cut her off, out of Hermione's mouth was, "Dumbledore..."

"Has taken a watch and wait stance on this."

The look of horror at the thought that an authority figure could stand by and do nothing was unexpected. Harry had thought they had

broken her of the bad habit of taking authority as being incapable of failure.

Harry said, "Hermione, I thought we told you that Dumbledore couldn't be trusted..."

She said softly, "Where it concerns the two of you and... Wait. Just because this concerns You-Know-Who he is willing to gamble the safety of the school?"

"Yup. And we can do nothing about it, because we need him right where he is when the war begins anew."

Hermione shook her head in disbelief. Neville took the chance to speak, "So what do we do, Harry?"

"I don't know. I've did a lot of reading on basilisks over the summer..."

"For good reason."

"... and one this old is probably going to be a certifiable nightmare to slay. And it is going to have to be put down. I wouldn't be surprised if whatever Voldemort made that set this in motion has prepared fail-deadly measures for the basilisk to go on a rampage if what ever the plan he has going is sent off the rails. Hopefully I will think of something before I have to go against it."

Hermione started, "And we'll..."

Harry broke in, more than a little harshly, "Stay out of it. Neither of you are among the physically fittest of people, and while you are both above average in power, basilisk hide is inch for inch more resistant to magic than a dragon's. I've had to get Alistair to give me the theory behind weakening my spells in order to do my school work. The sad truth is, for the foreseeable future, the two of you are going to be liabilities in a fight, and Alistair and I have agreed that I need to keep my actions as below Dumbledore's radar as possible, so help from other sources is going to be non-existent. He may be oath limited to noninterference in my life, but he is old and manipulative. He may find ways around the oaths. Nothing in this castle will report a single word about me to him, but teachers and students have so such compunctions. More over, he is the current

master of the warding magic, and so I can't bring in any back up without him knowing."

Neville grunted angrily, but could not refute this. So he just said, "So all that leaves us with is..."

"Me."

He spent the rest of the day calling up everything he could think of about basilisks, and reading about the changes other highly magical and highly dangerous creatures would go through when reaching extreme age. His thoughts were not pretty, nor were they hopeful.

At breakfast the next day, words were written on the walls of the Great Hall in foot tall green letters. The left wall had:

"The House of Salazar Slytherin has fallen far.

Ambition and cunning without moderation have destroyed a once noble group.

For both must be tempered with wisdom for actions to be effective;

With loyalty to ensure that friends and allies benefit as much as you;

With honor to ensure that the path taken is a just one."

The right bore another message:

"The pure that reside with the House of Snakes,

Are not meant to be those solely of so-called pure blood.

It is meant to be those of pure mind and spirit,

Those willing to fight for what is right for the right reasons."

Upon the wall behind the Head Table were written three lines, the first and the last in English, the middle in some language no one recognized, but it was generally believed the third line was a translation of it:

"The Other Heir

(foreign text)

Oblivion Take The Impure."

Breakfast was taken, for the first time in living memory, in complete silence. Apparently there were now two Heirs of Slytherin loose in the school, and only one was a Pureblood fanatic. No matter who tried, the messages could not be removed until they disappeared of their own accord, a week later.

Harry worked as he normally did, though he cut back on his working ahead, outside of what might be useful taking down an ancient monster, while he worked on the problem that faced him. He had recourse to seek some form of aid through the Charter, however nebulous and ethereal the offer was, should he be able to locate the Chamber. But that was his chief problem. He had no clue how to find it.

And so two weeks passed, with no attacks on anyone else within the castle.

Harry helped Luna with her work when she asked for it. She did not need it too often, but asked a couple times a week anyway. They spoke a number of times, and though she put on a bit of an act around most people, Harry found he liked her company, and started to view her as something on the order of a little sister. Or at least what he thought he would treat his little sister like if he had had one.

When the Gryffindor vs. Ravenclaw Quidditch match came around, Harry played in a daze, only half of his focus upon the match in question. He still caught the snitch after an hour and fifteen minute long match, in which the Ravensclaws were soundly thrashed, he just didn't pull off any of the fancy moves he had planned.

The next day, a first year muggleborn, that little blighter from Gryffindor who was always trying to get a picture of Harry, was found petrified in a hallway. His camera had been completely destroyed by the encounter.

Harry couldn't help but feel he was overlooking some vital piece of information that would help him. Something small but important. Sometimes he felt like he was hitting his head against a wall.

The next day, a new message was sprawled across the Great Hall:

"Salazar did not believe that first generation magicals

Were unworthy of ever going to Hogwarts.

Rather he believed that there was just too much

To teach them in their first years.

So he believed that there should be schools dedicated to

Teaching them just what they needed to know

Before they should enter these hallowed halls.

Oblivion Take The Impure."

Everyone in the castle was on edge. No one had descended into panic yet, but there was a sense of unease that rippled through the population of the school. Though no one had called him it to his face, or asked it even, the gossip network of the castle placed heavy odds on Harry being one of the Heirs. Which one, no one was willing to say.

The Weasley Twins, Gryffindor Tower's resident bookies, refused for the first time on record to take bets on something. They categorically refused citing friendship and loyalty. 'Honor before profit' is what they said. Harry scheduled some heavy prank-work to be done alongside the twins after the crisis was over. He owed it to them.

Nobody wanted to draw attention to anyone through pranks. It just wasn't right.

Harry continued to curse the perceived hole in his knowledge of the situation. Things continued in a holding pattern through to December. As the Lions geared up for their second match, Harry was deriding himself. He should be able to do better than this. They were all working off of sheer luck in the fact that no one had been killed in the two attacks so far.

When the Saturday game came around, Harry was not looking well. He had been driving himself into illness in his mad working of his mind. He was circling round and round, like a dog chasing his tail.

Due to this, the game carried on for four hours. Slytherin was completely humiliated by the time Harry caught the snitch. Rather than attend the customary victory party, Harry trudged up into his dorm and crawled into bed. He didn't come out until Monday morning.

And so he didn't realize the panic he would be descending into. Cho Chang of Ravenclaw and the ghost of that house, The Gray Lady, had been attacked and petrified.

There was no reply from The Other Heir to this attack. People wondered if perhaps he or she only fought with words, or if words had been exchanged for action and the person was now doing something, anything, to stop the attacks.

Groups of students moved from class to class in fearful clumps. No matter what the class, the students were subdued. Practical work was done as silently as possible, and few questions were asked when notes were being taken. Harry could practically taste the fear in the air.

He had to do something, and soon.

All hell broke loose the last day of classes before the holidays. There was one more attack. This one was on a pureblood. Daphne Greengrass was found petrified in a sixth floor girls' loo shortly before dinner. The mass exodus the next day left only a handful of students in the castle.

All of Slytherin had fled with an attack on one of their own purebloods. If one of their own could be attacked, none of them were safe. Only Draco and Ronald stayed behind, the former because it was cheaper to board for the winter and the latter because his family was visiting one of his brothers in Romania.

The other house that had left in its entirety were the Hufflepuffs. Those that could not go to their own homes for the Holidays were invited to a friend's home. No one in the House of the Loyal lacked for a place to go.

Half a dozen were left behind in the house of the wise, and all of those would only leave the known safety of their common room to get food. There was much wisdom and intelligence in discretion. And one of the six was Ginny, who was in the same position as the rest of the Weasleys.

And the House of Godric the Brave had the most who remained behind. Thirteen to be exact. Neville and Hermione were told point blank by Harry to 'Get out of Dodge', and though they put up a fight, they left for their homes. Luna's father, and only living parent, was out of the country. Harry made her promise not to leave the Tower without him. The twins were left for the same reason as their two younger siblings. They only left the tower with Harry and Luna. The other seven were various sixth and seventh seventh years who didn't know the phrase 'Discretion is the better part of valor'.

It was very early Christmas morning and Harry's presents lay ignored. He was pacing back and forth, and then he asked, "Alistair, did I ever ask where the message was left when the Chamber was first opened?"

"No, and it was across from a girl's toilet on the second floor. Myrtle tends to be rather fond of that loo, too. In fact... it was... where... she..."

"Died?"

"Yup."

"That is one to many coincidences for me," Harry said, as the pieces fell into place. He promised to mentally beat himself up later for not asking an obvious question. He had work to do.

He drew himself up to his full height, squared his shoulders, and looked at the hat that was hanging from his headboard.

"I, Harry James Potter, under Section I, Article I, Paragraph I of the Hogwarts Charter do hereby ask for help from the Sorting Hat of Hogwarts in regard to the need to slay Salazar's Basilisk."

Alistair responded in a voice clear and crisp enough to have edges, "As it is written, 'Those of Hogwarts who need help, only need but ask, and they shall receive it', So Mote It Be."

A bright silver sword with a red gem encrusted handle dropped from within the Hat and onto Harry's bed.

Looking at the weapon, Harry then dressed for a fight. Clothes that, while he could move freely in them, were neither loose nor baggy. Alistair informed Harry that every person in the castle saner than The-Boy-Who-Lived were safely in their rooms. Harry picked up the weapon, stuffed Al on his head, called Hedwig to his shoulder, and told Isis to hold down the fort.

He grimly smiled and made his way to the second floor.

A/N2: With a thousand years of biased history and prejudiced masses, attempts to slant history in a way more favorable to a groups view, I do not believe that Salazar could ever been anywhere as bad as is commonly believed. So in my world, he isn't.

This Years Quidditch schedule is as follows:

Hufflepuff vs. Slytherin

Gryffindor vs. Ravenclaw

Slytherin vs. Gryffindor

Ravenclaw vs. Hufflepuff

Ravenclaw vs. Slytherin

Hufflepuff vs. Gryffindor

End Of Line.

A/N: My gratitude to the reviewers, as always. Now, onto the fight. I assume a Professor's office is at least one of the ways they can access their quarters, and so if a student comes looking for them, they can be found. This chapter is growing out of control, probably one of the longest yet. Had a lot to cover.

Chapter 24: Fated II :: The Serpent King

Examining the sword in detail as he first went down into the common room, and then left the safety of the Tower, Harry saw that the weapon he had been given to help him had belonged originally to none other than Godric Gryffindor. Drawing his wand with his right hand from the sheath on his left wrist, Harry took the sword firmly in his left hand, and lengthened his strides. It was time to end this.

She was free. She'd finally managed to get rid of it. It had been so very, very hard. She had thrown it into a toilet, and fled. But she didn't get very far before she heard someone coming along the hallway. It was so early that no one should be up. Who could be here at this hour, and why here of all places?

She hid in an alcove, ducking behind a suit of armor. And she watched as he strode past her as though on a mission, with a grim purpose on his face. And he had a sword of all things... He must have figured it out. He must have found out enough to know where it was and he had come to kill it.

He stopped and tilted his head to one side as though listening to something, and she heard him mutter, "Now that's a new voice. Wonder where this one came from? Could mean that Myrtle is in a mood..." He shrugged and walked into the bathroom.

But this wasn't something he could face, could he? All of the stories she had read growing up were just that. Stories.

Scared out of her wits for the one person who everyone knows the name of, for the hero of the wizarding world, for a twelve year old who should not have to face it, she fled to the first place she could think of to get him help, the Deputy Headmistress, his head of house. And so, in a flash of red hair, she ran.

Harry entered the bathroom to the wails of its resident ghost. She was bawling and yelling about someone throwing something at her. So that's what he was hearing. Boy was she a loud one. But he couldn't help but shake the strangest feeling of déjà vu.

Nothing ventured, nothing gained, Harry asked, "Myrtle, I need to speak with you please?"

"No, you don't, you just want to throw more books at me." She started crying again.

"I haven't thrown anything at you, Myrtle. I need to ask you how you died."

Her attitude turned around faster than the spiders could get their carapaces out of the castle, "It was horrible. I was in the end stall, crying because Olive Hornby had been making fun of my glasses. There were a pair of people talking in a strange language, one of them was most definitely a boy. And so I poked my head out to tell him to go find his own toilet, and then I just died."

"Do you mind if I ask... How?"

She giggled. That couldn't be good. A ghost was taking a fancy to him. He hated being Fate's whipping boy. "Oh, not at all. I don't know how. I just remember seeing a pair of great, big, poisonous yellow eyes and then I just seized up and... Here I am." She pointed toward one of the sinks. "The eyes were right over there. Now I am going to see if I can find the person who threw that book at me!" And thankfully the ghost flew off.

Harry couldn't help but appease his curiosity and look for whatever book had been ditched. Leaning the sword against a wall, and pulling the book out of the toilet bowl, he cast a quick drying charm on it. He opened it to the first page, after which he dropped the book as if it had scalded him.

Property of:

T.M. Riddle

She was panting and frantic as she pounded on the door to Professor McGonagall's office. It was five minutes before the professor answered. Her mouth was set in a stern thin line, showing her irritation at the frantic pounding at her door so early in the morning, but given the events of the past two months, she was ready for whatever may have happened (heaven forbid should the worst come to pass) and seeing the absolutely panicked girl in Ravenclaw robes in front of her, she couldn't help but feel a little bit of fear.

"Now, Miss Weasley, calm down. Has there been another attack?"

The girl shook her head. She closed her eyes for a moment, in an attempt to gather her courage. "He... Harry... He's gone after... after... it..." She hissed the last word in such absolute fear, that McGonagall knew that she would have to go very slowly, and very carefully with the girl if she was going to get any information of use.

She just prayed it wasn't too long to help Harry, whatever that lunatic was up to.

All he could do was stare at it. Fate must really be in need of entertainment to make his life such a joke.

"In for a knut, in for a galleon." Harry stooped down and placed the diary in one of the sinks that Myrtle hadn't pointed to. If he managed to survive what came next, he would return for what might very well be the object behind this mess. And if he didn't... Well he wouldn't really have to worry about it anymore.

Moving over to the one she had indicated, he examined it until he felt an engraving on the side of one of the taps. An engraving of a snake. Jackpot.

Stepping back and focusing his mind for a moment, he spoke, ~Open.~

And the sink sank out of sight leaving a large pipe exposed. He picked up the sword, forced down his dread and fear, he muttered, "Gryffindors forward. Marching boldly into places where angels fear to tread."

He stuffed Alistair in a pocket, sheathed his wand, and asked Hedwig to travel down to him after he hit the bottom. He then jumped into the pipe, hoping for the best while expecting the worst. That way, if he survived, he would be pleasantly surprised.

After a long time sliding down the filthy pipe, it started to turn, and he started to slow. He was thrown out of the pipe and into a pool of stagnant water. He picked himself up, drew his wand, cast a quick scourgify on himself and his clothes, and set the Hat back on his head. Hedwig appeared in a burst of blue flames above him and rather than land on his shoulder, she circled above him.

He advanced deeper into the Chamber. He still had a basilisk to slay. Coming to a set of doors, he planted his feet wide, choose a spot on them a foot above the ground to lock his gaze on, and he hissed, ~Open.~

In the five minutes she had slowly been working Miss Weasley into relaxing, and then talking, Minerva McGonagall was horrified. That she had shown a complete lack of sense in so willingly writing in an intelligent object, she wondered how the girl had been sorted into Ravenclaw at all.

But that was a secondary issue, given the creator of the diary in question, compulsion charms nudging one into writing in it could not be out of the question. Lord Voldemort was indeed just that dangerous.

She shook her head, and continued the slow process of prying information out of Ginerva Weasley.

As the doors grounded open, Harry heard a venomous, insane voice scream, ~Intruder! The master warned me a false scion might come, warned me to kill him! Destroy and rend him!~ It then broke off into rambling about ashwinders.

As he though, 'Solitude and darkness does indeed drive a basilisk insane,' Hedwig started singing, and Harry felt his spirits bolstered by the song.

Letting Alistair direct where he pointed his wand, using the Hat's form of pseudo-sight, Harry thanked his mother, wherever she was. The last two dozen pages of her charm's journal was filled with what

he had begun to call her 'cut-and-paste' spell modifications. Almost every last single one that could be used on a combat spell required a great deal of power to pull off and be effective. This one in particular, much more than the others.

Repeating the wand motions for the spell he wanted to use six times at a deliberate pace, he muttered a long string of pseudo-Latin. As the chant ended at the same time as the sixth set of wand motions finished, he began a seventh set, pushing as much power as he could into the spell, incanting, "Conjunctivito!"

The end result was not just a simple burst of light that any targeted spell would deliver, instead this spell, specifically the Conjunctivitis Curse, came out as an ever increasing wall of light. The cost of casting a spell like this being the sheer strength needed to make it work over any distance, the time it takes to chant the alteration, and the fact that the wand motions need to be repeated six times, exactly, and end at the exact end of the chant, for it to work.

Harry was grateful that he had practiced this tactic like a man possessed, even though casting it made him feel like he had just run, all out, for a mile. Now all he could do was hope it worked.

The serpent had closed to within striking distance when it was struck full in its face by the spell. It hissed in pain and reared back, closing its eyes in pain.

The Hat practically screamed it Harry's head, 'Its blinded! Its eyes are closed! Whatever you are going to do, do it now!'

In all honesty, Harry never expected to survive this far into the fight, and so he had no plan. So he would just have to wing it. Knowing that magic was beyond useless at this point, he stuffed his wand back in its sheath, and wearily took the sword in both hands. He charged at the snake, finally getting a good look at all one hundred feet of it, the red plume on its head, and swung a heavy blow at it.

It bounced off. What obviously was a magically made and enhanced sword, bounced off. There were days he hated his life. And he had all of half a second to throw himself out of the way before it slammed into the ground where he had been.

Bugger.

So, the entirety of the outside of the snake was covered in absolutely impenetrable hide, leaving only the few soft targets available for attack. The eyes were still instant death if they opened, so they were out, leaving only...

It was insane. Suicidal.

He didn't really have a choice.

And gods did he need a real hobby like sane people have.

Besides which, no one had ever accused him of sanity.

So, throwing all self-preservation to the wind, Harry yelled/hissed at the top of his lungs, ~Hey ugly! I'm right here! Come on! Eat me!~

All Harry got from Alistair at the initiation of this scheme was sense of impending doom. Bah, ancient artifacts can be so touchy sometimes.

Of course, Harry got exactly what he wished for. The basilisk reared back, mouth open wide, and dived down on him. He planted his feet wide, brought the sword point up, and gripped tightly to the hilt of the blade. As the maw of the great serpent came down on him, he shoved the sword into the roof of its mouth, ignoring a sudden spike of pain in his right forearm. He twisted the blade back and forth one time to a hideous screech of pain from the beast (who had extremely horrid breath), before tearing the blade free and jumping back several times, before landing on his ass and dropping the blade.

The serpent was thrashing back and forth, and all Harry could do was watch as he slowly grew cold. He looked down to his forearm and saw a massive sodding fang going right through it. Ripping it out and staring at wound, he blinked dazedly at it. Basilisk venom was one of the most destructive substances known to wizard-kind. And... and... it had one theorized antidote, though no one had ever gotten a chance to test it.

The information was there on the tip of his tongue, but his mind was filling with a fog as Hedwig landed on his knee and looked at the mortal wound on his arm. He idly stroked her feathers with his left hand, even though that too was growing heavy. He tried for the life

of him, literally, to remember what it was he was trying to think of. It had to do with... with... He shook his head.

"Well, it has been a rather crappy run for me, hasn't girl?"

She started crying. Now, yes, him dying was something very sad, but hey, given his life so far, he wasn't going too painfully.

"Hey, now, there is no need to cry over me. I'm sure you will find someone just as helpless as I am for you to watch over."

He watched blankly as tear after tear dropped into the wound in his forearm, and stared in wonder as the damage was repair. And as his mind started to clear, he remembered just what it was he had been trying so hard to recall.

"Phoenix tears have remarkable healing capabilities, being able to heal some of the most grievous of wounds.' Like I was trying to say Hedwig, I'd be completely helpless without you. God, that fight wiped me out. I think I am just going to sit here for a few minutes and rest."

He slipped the basilisk fang into his pocket and stared at the corpse of the thousand year old monster he had just killed.

If she had been horrified by the beginning of Miss Weasley's tale, her reaction to the end, of Miss Weasley working up the courage to throw the book away and of how Harry had been acting, was a mixture of pride and outright horror. Who each emotion was directed at was a whole other question. She couldn't help but agree that they boy was probably going to try something stupidly heroic. It had taken another ten minutes to get it all from the girl, and now Minerva had no time to waste. Standing up and rushing over to the fireplace...

There was a gentle knocking at her door. She made an irritated sound, and moved over to the door, ready to rip whoever it was a new one for interrupting her when she had such dire events on her hands. She swung the door open with her most stern look on her face to see...

The young man in question. He was filthy, covered in slime, filth, and blood, though for some reason Alistair sat pristinely on his head. He looked dead on his feet. He held a blood stained sword loosely in

left hand, and a book in a death grip in his right. On his right forearm was a fresh circular lump of scar tissue.

Her faced changed instantly to relief. His went from slightly dazed to outright confusion.

"Get in here Mister Potter and sit down. I think you have a lot of explaining to do."

"I'd rather not explain until we can have someone from the DMLE here, and maybe even from the Prophet, Professor. I don't want to have to go through it more than once. Besides which, I am absolutely knackered. I came this close," He held up two fingers a hairsbreadth apart, "to dying putting that thing down. Right now I just want to sleep."

She looked him over again, and decided her description of 'dead on his feet' was an understatement. "Get going to the Hospital Wing then Mister Potter, I will Floo your guardians..."

"Nic and Pen don't have a Floo connection. If you ask Hedwig after she has had a chance to rest, she might agree to take a letter to them for you. You can try and Floo Sirius if want though. I'm sure you can get one of the elves to drag him out of bed."

"Of course, I'll also direct Professor Lupin to go the Wing. And I shall join you shortly."

He nodded weakly and walked off, wobbling a little. Hedwig went over to McGonagall's desk and stuck her leg out.

In short order, everyone had been informed and were most likely on their way, Ginny was being escorted back to the Ravenclaw Tower by Flitwick, who was told that he would be informed just what was going on later, and to keep it from the Headmaster.

Harry was sitting on a bed in the Hospital Wing ten minutes later with Madam Pomfrey clucking at him in her usual disappointment at his being injured. He covered his mouth as he had a jaw cracking yawn. And for some reason he had managed to get himself clean.

The sword leaned up against a nearby wall, Alistair set upon a nightstand, and the diary was still held in a death grip.

When McGonagall entered, it was Al who first spoke, "Ah, Deputy Headmistress, I assume you've managed to inform at least one of Harry's next of kin?"

"Yes, Alistair, I have. Since Mr. Potter doesn't seem to be in critical condition, they've decided that Professor Lupin being here is suitable. And now I'd like to talk about why Mr. Potter was so keen on getting both the DMLE and someone from the Prophet here."

"It was mostly my idea. As Harry was resting from having done something suicidally insane to kill the basilisk, I bounced ideas off of him about how best to proceed. Eventually, we agreed that full disclosure to the public was best, no matter how much of this Albus wishes to slip this under the rug."

Harry made a sound of assent, "Yes, and I willing to give testimony by pensive, veritaserum, and magical oath to verify my side of what has happened. I do not want anyone to get the idea that I was behind all of this because of what the Prophet says."

Alistair made a noise of generalized assent, and said, "And when you inform the DMLE, tell them that the guilty party is Lord Voldemort by way of an extremely powerful Dark Object of unknown powers. Ask them to do everything they can to get an Unspeakable here."

"But I am not letting this," He waved the diary around, "Out of my possession until I've seen it destroyed."

McGonagall just nodded, knowing that tomorrow was going to be a difficult day. But that aside, she asked Madam Pomfrey, "So how is he?"

She was interrupted in answering when Remus came over to Harry and shot him an appraising look.

"Hey, Moony. Sorry to bug you at this time of the morning, but I just had to go kill a snake that was squatting in the deepest subbasement."

The aforementioned Marauder just stared blankly as a crooked grin sprang to the young man's face. Pomfrey pushed onwards.

"Apart from being exhausted physically and magically, he has a few muscle pulls, a sprained wrist, and that lump of scar tissue, that no one is going to be able to do anything about, he is perfectly fine. Definitely in better condition than when his teammates dragged him in here after he ploughed himself into the ground. He should take the next few days easy, for the exhaustion, and I've already set everything else to rights, but otherwise there is nothing I can do apart from give him a sleeping potion, and he is not bad enough off that I am willing to knock him out for a day. I am willing to release him so that his Christmas isn't a whole bust."

Harry nodded, set Alistair on his head, and picked up the sword. McGonagall said, "I'm going to let Professor Lupin escort you back to the Tower. Make sure you do not get into any more trouble, Mr. Potter."

Remus broke out of his daze and nodded in the affirmative.

"Of course ma'am... I hope that whoever when to you about the diary can get help. They are probably just as much a victim as anyone who was petrified."

All she could do at this statement was nod. He may have been mostly passed out when he ended up at her office, but he was still one of the more intelligent students in the school.

Harry knew he was going to spend most of Christmas in a daze. He'd locked the sword and diary away, set Alistair on the back of his headboard, and briefly considered opening his presents. He decided he'd rest for a bit and then go through them. He remembered the presents he had gotten for other people, mostly copies of texts that were in the Potter Library that he had the elves duplicate.

A rare Herbology text for Nev, something on Occlumency for Hermione, the twins got theory books on Potions and Charms, Luna got a book on magical creatures of questionable existence, Remus got a pair of early revisions of Hogwarts, A History, Sirius got a box that exploded in his face and turned his skin green and his hair silver (that would teach him not to slip laxatives in a supposed 'care package') and in the bottom was a pocket watch, and the Flamels

got a set of silverware that had gold inlaid flame designs (he still had no clue about their tastes).

He went down into the still empty common room and passed out on the couch. Luna was the first one down an hour later, and she just sat down in a nearby chair to quietly read her new book.

Harry slowly came back to consciousness to the sound of whispering. "Fred, George, if you even think about trying anything, I'll hang both of you by your ankles from the battlements."

"Oh, Harrykins is finally..."

"... awake. Wonder what he did that..."

"... has him so knackered on Christmas?"

Harry cracked his eyes against what appeared to be midday light, and then looked around. He whipped his wand out and set up some privacy spells. He hadn't told the twins or Luna. The twins because they were only two years a head of him, and he had not wanted to put them in harms way, and Luna because it would just be a weight on her she could do nothing about.

But, now that it was over, he took the time to tell the three of them what had happened. He whined slightly about how he could have wrapped this all up earlier if he had thought to ask a pair of obvious questions.

The twins each thumped him upside the head and told him he wasn't perfect. And it was then that he noticed someone had brought his presents down. He gave the twins the evil eye and all they did was grin roguishly. Harry checked his watch and saw it was almost eleven.

He saw that Luna was nearby, and had been apparently reading the present he had given her. She smiled brightly and said, "Open your pressies, Harry! Then let's go eat."

From Hermione he got a book on magical combat, Neville got him a dueling manual. Fred and George gave him a copy of their joke notes. He got another Weasley Christmas care package (and made a note that he really had to get Mrs. Weasley something next year).

Luna got him a year's subscription to the Quibbler. Remus gave him a set of self-inking quills and stationery and from Sirius came a blue leather-bound journal with one word on the front 'Animagus'. And the Flamels sent him a letter and a book. The letter explained that the book they sent him was a master library ledger that would be compatible with his linking books. It also included directions on how to compile a linking book to access two libraries.

He stared blankly at that for a moment. The Flamels had had Family magics shared with them. That meant that they (or their family, though Harry had an odd feeling that the pair were much older than they seemed) had been allies of the Potters for a long time. Interesting.

The rest of the day was spent with Harry alternating napping, playing card games, and of course going to meals. After lunch Lupin pulled Harry aside and demanded an explanation, which Harry reluctantly gave him. He didn't let the son of Prongs out of his sight for the rest of the day. Harry wasn't feeling up for much, so he mostly read and napped.

The twins dumped Harry into his bed that night.

McGonagall came and got Harry from the tower shortly after ten in the morning. She told him that the Head Auror had come to the castle, and had managed to bring one of the Unspeakables from the Department of Mysteries, who was apparently an expert in Dark Magical objects. A reporter would be there to observe, and would be allowed to ask a few questions. And Lupin would be acting as one of Harry's guardians. Dumbledore would, unfortunately, be there.

Harry simply nodded at this. Alistair had already carefully laid out a plan for dealing with the possible fall-out from this disaster, and Harry was going to stay on script.

Of course the room they chose just happened to be meeting room seven.

Taking a seat in the room and looking around, Harry waited for Alistair to do his thing... It was his show after all.

Alistair cleared his throat, and said, in his most official voice, "I would thank all of you for coming, I have asked for this... debriefing,

for lack of a better word, to bring to light the causes behind the events that started on Halloween and resulted in three students, a cat, and a ghost ending up petrified. If I may, for the Record Book of Hogwarts and, ask everyone for their first and last name; or in the case of our D.o.M. consultant, a codename, and title, we can get started. I am Alistair, the Sorting Hat of Hogwarts."

"Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts."

"Minerva McGonagall, Deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts."

"Rufus Scrimgeour, Head of the Auror Office."

"Shadow, Unspeakable of the Department of Mysteries."

"Edward Limus, Reporter for the Daily Prophet."

"Harry Potter, Boy-Who-Lived, Basilisk Slayer, and Fate's Chew Toy."

"Remus Lupin, Acting Guardian to Harry Potter."

Alistair then went into a brief spiel about the Chamber, Slytherin's Basilisk, and the attacks. He then 'explained' about how Harry had 'investigated' what had been going on (in short the Hat lied through his non-existent teeth about how Harry had ended up getting into a fight with a massive serpent). He included the fact that the guilty party both times the Chamber was opened was in fact Tom Riddle, better known as Lord Voldemort.

Alistair then said, because he was the one being Harry trusted the most at Hogwarts, and due to his general mistrust of the headmaster, which Alistair noted was well deserved, he could not go outside of the castle for aid, so Harry invoked the very first paragraph of the Charter. And of course, Alistair gave the help that was sought.

He then turned the story over to Harry, who stood up and took out his wand. "First and foremost I want to say this:

"I, Harry James Potter, Heir to the Most Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter, Heir to the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black, hereby swear on my Magic that I had no involvement in the opening of The Chamber of Secrets, outside of any actions undertaken by

myself to see that the crisis would end as soon as possible. So Mote It Be."

With the soft flash of light that signified that the oath was in effect, Harry then cast a quick lumos to prove he still had his magic. He then used the pensieve that the castle had provided to show the memory of what had happened yesterday morning. He began it with his walking into the bathroom, and ended when he had been healed by Hedwig.

When all present had viewed the memory, they could only stare in silence at the twelve year old. When he finally got tired of them looking at him, he said, "If you guys don't believe it, I am willing to take truth serum or swear an oath that that is a true memory. Oh, and by the way, that basilisk corpse is mine by Right of Conquest. I'll be contracting Gringotts for the rendering of the body."

Alistair took the meeting back on course. "I believe that provides for all the relevant information, besides the one unknown of who the Diary was using. It is my firm belief that the person is as much a victim as anyone who is in the Hospital Wing petrified, and that he or she should at least see a Mind Healer. Are there any questions before we have Shadow examine the object in question?"

There was still generalized silence.

"Very good, Shadow?"

The person, who was dressed in gray robes that hid all of his body, with gloves covering his hands, and a cloak hiding the face, rose from his/her seat and said, in a voice that was impossible to describe after the fact, "I have permission for Mr. Potter to be present while I examine the object, but no others."

Scrimgeour simply nodded, rose and said, "I think that is all I am needed here for, apart from asking if the D.o.M. is going to ensure the destruction of the object?"

Shadow said, "Yes. The D.o.M. just wishes to identify the magics around the book to ensure its quick and effective destruction."

The Head Auror left, followed by the reporter, who had no other questions.

McGonagall pointedly looked between Harry and the Unspeakable. The boy smiled, and said, "I'm sure I'll be just fine professor. Here," He took Alistair off his head. "I noted that he said nothing about Al staying, so you should take him."

Dumbledore pointedly remained in his seat, until the castle got out two syllables, "Dumble..." He was running out the door, wondering what the hell the castle had against him. The man

Lupin had only stayed in the room long enough to watch Albus try something, and with a grin fixed on his face he left, closing the door behind him.

For the next ten minutes, Harry watch as Shadow was bent over the book, casting spell after spell on it. For five minutes after he had cast his last spell, he merely contemplated the diary.

"I have never, in all my years, Mr. Potter, encountered an object so full with dark energy. This book is comprised of a number of magics, chief among them being a personality/memory imprint of one of the darker varieties. The imprint of the person in this book will not remain unchanging and immutable as most such would, instead it grows progressively more twisted and evil so long as it exists.

"The next major portion of the magics is a soul anchor. This book has had a small portion of the creator's magical core and life energy embedded into it, and then it was made to resonate with spiritual energy of the one who made it. It is one of the more basic methods Dark Wizards use to prolong their lives.

"There would probably be some who, with lesser knowledge of the magics involved, mistake this object for another piece of even darker magic...

"Then there are two separate... hordes for lack of a better term, of lesser spells. One group makes this object near impossible to locate remotely, the other group makes the object nigh indestructible. The only thing I can think of that will destroy an object like this is Fiendfyre..."

Harry pulled the basilisk fang that had pierced his arm from his pocket. "Or how about we try stabbing it with this?"

The person under the hood directed a stare at the fang in the boy's hand. "You kept something that almost killed you?"

"Hey, it failed. So, could it work?"

"Basilisk venom is a highly corrosive magical substance, its worth trying."

Shadow then conjured a high-walled steel tray and placed the book in it, stepping carefully away.

Harry, his face set into a stony look of resolve, brought the fang down into the center of the diary. There was an ear rending scream as the book started... bleeding... ink. He twisted the fang a few times for good measure.

Shadow came back over, performed a few quick spells, and then said, "It's dead. I assume you are going to keep this as a trophy?"

"Nope, gonna toss it into a fire the first chance I get. Take the ashes of that fire and bury them somewhere. Good riddance to bad rubbish."

The Unspeakable chuckled and then said, in what Harry believed was an ominous fashion, "We'll be watching you, Mr. Potter."

The person then disappeared from sight. Harry blinked at that. Well that wasn't apparation, so it probably got him around the school's wards. Damn that was unsettling. He left the conference room to go take a nap, the dead diary in hand. And hoped it was a long time until he ran into another unspeakable.

A/N2: VICTORY! Victory for Potter! Probably going to try and write a newspaper article for use in the next chapter. And yes, the diary was not a horcrux.

A/N: My thanks to anyone and everyone who reviews this story. Sorry for the no-update day, my muse decided she did not like this chapter, and so it took longer than usual to write.

500+ Reviews! Let me again say how thankful I am for each and every single one!

Chapter 25: The Calm Afterwards

The evening of January First found Harry absently rubbing his slightly aching right forearm. It wasn't anywhere near as stiff as it had been in the days following Christmas, but he was flubbing every one out of ten wand movements.

He'd been lucky that the worst he'd dealt with so far was a minor concussive backlash. Given that when he had first started doing spell work he had been getting one out of ten correct instead wrong, but it had forced him to practice the twelve basic wand movements. There was a chapter about them in their first year charms book, but Flitwick never handed out any work on them... Being the head of Ravenclaw, he probably assumed everyone at least read all the material once.

So instead of working ahead, he was working on getting back to form. It was annoying. He started the work on his metamorph abilities that had been interrupted when he had gone all out against the danger the Chamber posed. He also started reading the Animagus journal. He'd heard the stories of his father, Padfoot, and the traitor making the transformation.

Of course, though they had never told him, he had figured out Remus was a werewolf. He was ill around the full moon, he avoided silver as though it was deadly, but for some reason he was terrified of rabbits. He assumed there was a connection with Remus's (then) three best friends taking non-human forms. He'd have to talk to Moony some point soon.

He should probably do some reading on werewolves first. Maybe he'd dedicate a linking book to it.

He'd just gotten back into the common room from 'writing' wand movements into the air in an unused classroom. He found a spell for each separate movement that when done correctly glowed green

and when flubbed glowed red. And the reds were finally starting to thin out further.

Slinging himself down onto a couch, he pulled out yet another plain leather bound journal. Anyone who paid attention to what Harry read (and by and large even Hermione had stopped doing that part way through first year; Harry could probably give their entire year in Ravenclaw a run for their money in the number of books read department) saw that he was either reading plain gray books with the Potter House coat of arms on the front cover, all of which were identical save for the word that ran along binding, or he was reading a large variety of leather bound journals.

Turning the page of this one he was reading, he made an inarticulate sound of rage. He read the new page a second time and had to restrain himself from throwing the book in the fire. He stuffed the offending journal in his bag, he pulled out his linking book that revolved around 'Wizarding Law (currently in effect)'. Boredom always helped him fight rage.

Besides, having solicitors and barristers on retainer is all well and good, but given how self-serving Purebloods tended to be, a knowledge of what loopholes they had built into the system could be helpful.

He also idly thought of how the rest of the aftermath of his trip into the Chamber had gone. He'd written to Neville and Hermione to say that it was all over and that the school was safe. He'd talked to Padfoot on the mirror, and the old dog had been torn between pride at his godson slaying monster like that and worry that his godson was suicidally insane.

But he had really enjoyed the newspaper article...

Boy-Who-Lived Slays Basilisk

Makes Halls of Hogwarts Safe

He would have preferred it if the journalist had referred to him as 'Fate's Chew Toy' at one point, but hey, the story had been translated into over a dozen languages and syndicated world wide. But hey, the front page picture was of him posing with the corpse.

Thinking of the corpse, the goblins had simply portkeyed it out of the Chamber. And in exchange for a tithe of the bones, blood, viscera, flesh, and venom, they were going to render the beast down into parts, and act as his agents, for a discounted rate, for whatever portions he would want to sell. Three percent of each sale would go to the goblins instead of the usual fifteen.

The basilisk parts were going to be in storage. He hadn't decided on whether or not to sell the pieces yet.

Apparently the British Wizarding World had loved him because they were terrified of what Voldemort was doing to them and the rest of the Wizarding World loved him because if Voldemort could do what he did to his own countrymen, what would he do to the the rest of them?

So that being said, most of the Wizarding World on the planet was always a little starved for Potter news. Harry found it more than a little disturbing that he was a global celebrity.

Dumbledore was pacing his office. The situation with Harry had spiraled far out of control. Not only was the boy no long safe under the blood wards of his own devising, he didn't even heed that the Headmaster even existed. How was the young man to fulfill the prophecy if the greatest wizard alive was not there to direct him? They were doomed if he could not control Harry as he had planned. Voldemort was going to kill them all.

He was a bit proud of how Harry had resolved the situation, but it wasn't because of how he had maneuvered the boy. He couldn't have Harry be this independent, nor this willing to fight lethally. The world needed a hero of light, not gray.

Fawkes watched on as his long time friend slipped further and further from the moral high ground. The road to hell was indeed paved with good intentions.

Monday, January Fourth saw classes begin again. Harry had eventually settled on the wand movement equivalent of enunciating. Carefully and deliberately was how he performed his spells. He

really hated the fact that he would have to build his speed and fluidity back up. He also started working with his left hand, just in case his right never got back up to form.

He cornered Remus yesterday, and told him point blank that he'd figured out the man's... 'furry little problem'. Which sent the Marauder into hysterics, for the sheer reason that that was exactly what James had called it. Then he congratulated Harry on figuring it out so quickly and easily, and then swore him to secrecy. Harry gave Moony a look of utmost contempt. He knew perfectly well that the secret needed to remain a secret.

He preferred to use his right hand, but with the number of broken bones his Uncle, and later Dudley, had given him, often focusing on his favored side and at torso level, he had often had to resort to working in school with his left. He remembered a few of his primary school teachers calling him ambidextrous. He thought it was he just got too much damned practice.

Both Neville and Hermione noted the change in his wand work over the next week, and he told them he would be fine, and that it had been worse.

Two weeks later, Harry was sitting in the common room, staring intently at a mirror that was floating in front of him. He'd been like that, near unmoving for an hour, save for an increasingly severe scowl. No one in the House, save Neville and Hermione, had understood where the apparent vanity had come from.

Then his hair turned as white as snow. His screams of celebration were a little unnerving. And they lasted for all of a minute before he was back in the chair, staring at the mirror, a grin on his face.

An hour later his hair was changing color every other minute.

The next day, his hair was back to his normal color for the most part, but had streaks of red the same color as what he saw in pictures of his mother.

Snape was so very, very torn. He had wanted to fail a Potter at potions, but the boy's work had never been anything less than exemplary. In fact it was more often than not, perfect. And his written assignments reminded him more of his mother than his ponce of a father, who was a dunderhead at anything that didn't have to do with transfiguration or combat.

But he looked so very, very much like James that he just couldn't help but hate him, not matter how much of Lily he had in him, with regards to personality and intellect.

And then he came into Potions class, and his hair had red in it. A lot of red. Her red. If the Potter brat started to look any less like his father, Severus Snape may very well have to change his his mind, and make an opinion about the boy based on his own merits.

That thought gave the Potions Master a small chill. He hated having to change his mind.

Neville cornered Harry in the common room near the end of January.

"Harry, just how was it that the House of Black pauperized the Malfoys?"

Blinking several times at this particular non sequitur, Harry explained, "It was rather easy actually. Even with all of the money they did have, they either spent it on two things, themselves or making more money. But the biggest problem with this is they tended not to be the best planners, or employ the best of planners. So when Sirius bought up all their debts, it would have equaled a good seventy to eighty percent of their net worth. Add to that fact that he annulled the marriage between Lucius and Narcissa, due to the fact that Lucy bears the loyalty brand of the one responsible for the death of a male Black, and that Paddy demanded the return of the dowry, with interest. That put them in a hole that they barely managed to get out of and maintain solvency. Draco's just lucky his trust vault is in his name."

Neville blinked at that rather twisted way of doing business, but he could vaguely understand it. "Sounds like a rather interesting and bloodless way to get rid of a Death Eater."

"It wouldn't have been bloodless if he hadn't have gotten his hands on the money. Goblins consider debtors to be thieves, and theft is a capital crime in the Goblin Nation. So it is a really, really good rule of thumb to never borrow money from the goblins. Ever."

By the time the next Quidditch match rolled around, Harry had continued to improve his casting with both hands, but he had also figured out how to play with the length of his hair. He'd gotten a handle of it a few days before, and was slowly lengthening it. The longer it got, the less of a disaster it was, but he was a bit iffy on how long he actually wanted it.

Cheering on Hufflepuff as they ruthlessly beat the Ravensclaws, Harry knew that the last match of the year against the badgers was going to be fun. Of course, he had absolutely no interest in going to the next Quidditch match. Gryffindor had already beaten both the teams that were playing. Seeing the snitch and Cedric going after it, Harry idly wondered when he would finish up reading the third year material.

After a few months of careful planning, Harry and the Twins pulled off their a rather... interesting prank. They gave each professor a theme song. They had to contract out the sound recording to Padfoot, but that was a rather minor thing.

For one week, each member of the faculty was followed around by an orb. Each time the person and the orb entered a room with more than seven other people present the song would play.

As a few examples, Severus Snape had the 'The Imperial March' composed by John Williams, Minerva McGonagall had Ted Nugent's "Cat Scratch Fever", Filius Flitwick was given "Eye of the Tiger" by Survivor, and Dumbledore got "They're Coming to Take Me Away, Ha-Haaa!" by Jerry Samuels.

They were really glad that they had made Snape's nigh indestructible. Besides which, every time the greasy-haired git tried to get rid of it, it started playing again.

During the first week of March, Hermione sat down next to Harry and asked, "What are those gray books I've seen you reading?"

He had been wondering when she would finally ask after his reading seemingly identical books without end. True it had taken a few months for her to actually notice, but that was probably because the sheer amount of his reading had put the other members of the House off on asking him what he was reading. So, after setting up a few privacy spells, he explained about the Potter Family Library. A look of awe crossed her face, but the hunger that entered her eyes was a little unnerving.

"I'm sorry, Hermione, but the magics are set up so they only work for Potters. And as I am the last living Potter, they only work for me."

The crestfallen look on her face as he said this was expected, but she said, "I understand Harry, I just hope that you eventually let me take a look around the library itself."

"Eventually."

Harry was having a really difficult time getting the consistency of his hair to change in a manner that he liked. Whenever he changed it to get his hair under control, he just couldn't stand either how it looked or how it acted, and ended up changing it back.

He eventually settled on his normal, everyday uncontrollable hair, with the red streaks, but lengthened to his mid-back. He kept the majority of it tied back with a simple strip of leather, but he kept his fringe. He really didn't like his scar.

Looking in the mirror and nodding he sat down to start working on his eyes. Most of the school were out watching the 'Claws and the Snakes play Quidditch, but as the game had absolutely no bearing on who won the Cup, and combined with the fact that Harry disliked one of the houses and hated the other, he had decided he had better things to do with his time.

Harry had just finished trapping the hell out of his current defenses. The joke traps had given way to more serious defenses, but there were still a few of the more... surreal... traps he had come up with stuck in there.

Putting Alistair on his head, he brought the hat into the inner sanctum of his mind.

"Okay Al. Confusion, chaos, and distraction. What's next?"

"Simple, pain and wounding. You've given your mind teeth and claws, now sharpen them. Do you need any tips, tricks, or pointers?"

"No, it's obvious enough... But I think I am going to need some more room..."

He shrugged and knew he was going to eventually have to redo everything. First he'd need to finish learning from Alistair, and then he'd need to actually take time to map and plan how everything would fit together. This was going to take a while... And his mind's defenses were going to be nothing short of a chaotic warzone before he untangled it.

Harry had finally finished his work on the third year as the spring holidays rolled around. He had also finally finished working on his metamorph abilities, at least for this level of control. He kept his eyes green, for the main part because he had always liked his eyes.

He had also finally stopped flubbing wand movements during the course of normal classwork. Sure he wasn't yet back to his previous level with either hand, but he could use both hands interchangeably, which he took as some consolation.

He'd read the Animagus journal over four or five times, and had decided it would be better to hold off on it until he had at least finished working through the equivalent of fifth year. He'd then read the book again, and see if it made more sense.

On the third day of the holidays, Harry dragged himself into Remus's office. For some bloody reason both he and Sirius wanted him here. The fact that he would rather be taking a nap notwithstanding.

They were both sitting around the room, grinning like fools.

"Alright Heckle and Jeckle, just why did I have to drag my backside here so soon after lunch? Its my preferred nap time on off days..."

The two looked at each other, stared at Harry, and looked back at each other again.

Padfoot began, "Well we were planning on offering you a chance to go traveling over the summer."

Harry made a motion with his hand for them to continue.

Remus rolled his eyes and said, "Sirius here is planning on making a world tour of beaches, six continents, twenty beaches, in ten weeks."

Padfoot had a rather lecherous grin on his face when he picked up the thread of the conversation, "And Moony here is visiting a number of retreats and a few monasteries to try and get some help with his furry problem." He gave a sour look at the thought of a vacation spent this way.

Remus smacked the last of the Blacks in the shoulder and said, "I know how you are with the Mind Arts Harry, and the places I am visiting are considered the premier centers of that particular set of disciplines."

Harry nodded, and said, "I haven't really figured out anything yet, so I'll take your offers under advisement, I'd still need to talk to Nicolas and Perenelle anyways..."

The final match of the Quidditch season, Hufflepuff vs. Gryffindor, had finally rolled around. Harry had a grin plastered on his face as he walked out to the pitch, his broom slung over one shoulder, and there was only one thought going through his head.

'This is going to be fun.'

He gave a bow to Cedric as Madam Hooch had the Captains shake hands. Cedric grinned himself and returned the bow as Hooch continued with her statement of wanting a clean match, and told them all to kick off.

The match that followed was as vicious as a game could be without any intentional fouls. Harry did his level best to disrupt the play of the Hufflepuff Chasers, distract the Keeper, and force the Beaters to take shots at him.

A brutal two hours later, Harry barely beat Cedric in the chase for the snitch. Gryffindor won the Inter-House Quidditch Cup for the second year running.

For the rest of April and most of May things carried on as usual in the castle. Then of course came the madness that everyone (save Harry) called end of year exams. Harry called it exactly what he thought it was, useless insanity. The fact that he walked all over the rest of his class and took the top spot didn't matter. He just didn't like the exams, and had to resist the urge to hex the fifth and seventh years who were having panic attacks.

There was a reason for the irritability though. Something... strange... was happening to some of Harry's senses. Sometimes he heard a buzzing like high-tension power wires, except he could almost hear tunes and melodies coming from it. Other times it felt like something was pressing down on his entire body, and at times he swore it would vibrate. And then there were the times that objects seemed to either be surrounded by light, or glow out right.

He even willingly went to Madam Pomfrey and asked to be checked over to see if anything was wrong with him. She of course found nothing. He considered the possibility that he had become schizophrenic. His familiars wouldn't even talk about that course of reasoning.

When the choices for next year's elective courses came around, Harry choose Arithmancy, Ancient Runes, and Care of Magical Creatures. Neville ended up choosing Runes and Magical Creatures,

and Hermione, no matter how much Harry tried to talk her out of it, choose all of the electives. She really still was a nutter.

Sirius at this point in time had finally received the invoices from his seizure of the Lestrangle and Malfoy fortunes. Taking one look at the sheer amount of paper work there, he decided to leave it until after his vacation.

The Leaving Feast was eaten among Gryffindor colors for the second year running. Hufflepuff was in second place, with Slytherin a distant third followed in the end by the Ravenclaws. Harry picked at his food. Quite frankly he was bored with any gathering like this. Too many people.

He idly focused on the conversations around him. People were talking about their summer plans. He had already spoken with the only five people in this school who he wanted to know about.

Hermione was going to France with her parents. Now Harry didn't have anything against the France Wizarding World, they had fought tooth and nail against Grindelwald and his followers to the very last. However the majority of the mundanes of that nation had rolled over. He'd only go to that country if he stayed in the wizarding world.

Neville had managed to talk his Gran into a trip to three of the wizarding equivalent of a botanical garden on the Continent. Harry had wished Nev good luck in getting any new plants.

Mr. Weasley had won the The Daily Prophet Grand Prize Galleon Draw and the family was going to take a trip to Egypt to visit the eldest brother, Bill, who was a curse breaker for Gringotts. So the twins would be able to raise hell far away from where Harry was planning on being. He hoped they didn't cause any international incidents.

Luna was going on an expedition with her father to look for... he couldn't quite be sure what the hell they were looking for, but he hoped they found it. Harry did not believe that all things were known, or even knowable. Somethings had to be taken on belief.

He smiled. This time two years ago he would have most likely be locked up alone in a cupboard. Sure there was a hell of a lot more mortal peril than there used to be, but at least he had some company between threats to life and limb.

Halfway through the train ride back to London and the four in the last compartment of the last car were reading various books and magazines, Neville suddenly said, "The one thing that no one ever figured out was who the 'Other Heir' was. He fired off a few messages about Salazar Slytherin and then disappeared."

Hermione gave one of her patented huffs, and said, "There was no way of telling."

Luna smiled serenely and said, "No, there were a few clues, Hermione, just none of them direct. There was another known parselmouth in the school, who had a juvenile basilisk as a familiar, and who was reading a thousand year old green leather bound journal like a man possessed during the two months that the attacks were occurring."

Then Neville and Hermione stared at Harry as Luna went back to reading the latest issue of the Quibbler. He was shamelessly avoiding looking at anyone at all by burying his face further in the book he was reading.

Neville shook his head and said, "Harry, you are utterly incapable of lying to anyone who you consider a friend. Even if you say nothing at all."

Giving a wry smile as he showed his face, he reached down into his bag and pulled out a green journal. "The personal diary of my ancestor, Salazar Slytherin. There are you happy? The really frustrating thing is I read this for every spare moment I had during those two months, and I finally found the sections on the Chamber, on the first sodding day of the new year, a week after I went up against the basilisk"

He put the book away, though he noticed Hermione eying it with interest. "You couldn't read it Hermione, it's written in parseltongue."

Her look of disappointment was almost humorous, but the four settled back into amicable silence for the rest of the ride. When they

got off the train, Harry was ready to spend two weeks with his guardians before leaving with Remus for the trip.

Here Ends Book II

Interlude

Divisions and Reflections

Harry saw himself on one side of a wall of rubble with Ronald and the Golden Dandy on the other. More useless people to bring to a confrontation he could not think of. He was aware of the old man, watching, waiting, proud that he had managed to create a seemingly selfless hero. Proud of his little chess piece.

The fight with Riddle, who had been allowed to get this far in the use of his soul anchor, to test the resolve of Harry, to test his loyalty to the manipulative old man. When the phoenix showed up, it was not because of the loyalty shown, but instead because, as a creature of light, it could stand by no longer.

Harry won, but not by his own merits or abilities (or insanity), but through sheer luck. Luck of the kind that can create a dependance upon it, and lead to death and disaster. And then he let the old coot take the sword. Who in their right mind gives up a magical object of that power when it was freely given?

Harry could tell the version of himself he was seeing was going to be used. Like a pawn. He was going to be disposable, just like a pawn. And more over, he was being forged into something. What he couldn't tell yet.

And then he started to feel himself rise, feel himself waking up, and he was again assaulted by voices...

"... the entire garrison from the fortress..."

"... oh, thank Merlin! I was afraid..."

"... I hereby invoke the the Final Section of the Article of Last Resort. To be specific, I..."

"... under attack! Need reinforcements, Death Eaters..."

"... somethings I have told only one person. Sorry, but..."

"... call to the four winds! Shatter the..."

"... go from here. My purpose is behind..."

He rolled over and punched his pillow. This was the second damn time! What was wrong in that head of his?

A/N2: And there we go. This section ends book two with a word count of roughly 24k.

A/N: Thanks to all the reviewers!

If I ever do another fanfic that starts from the very beginning , I am going to take it even farther back, and have Dumbledore raising Harry. I think that would make for an interesting story... *Insert evil laughter here*

But then again, I don't plan on doing a full seven years again for a good long while after I finish up this one.

Chapter 26: The First Leg of the Summer

Being Events in Reflection of Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

Harry was in a foul mood for the rest of that first day of the summer. That dream had been really annoying. Sure, he had managed to remember a little more than the last time it had happened. The fact that whatever it was that he viewed (and he still couldn't remember the details) was a reflection of what had happened to him in the Chamber. A reflection that hadn't come to pass, and was by and large worse for him as a person. And then he remembered a haze of voices. He could remember a couple of words and phrases, but they were more confusing for their lack of context than anything else. And he felt that the three impressions from last time were reinforced, with underlines and bullet points.

And he didn't have Alistair to keep him company. Though the Hat had encouraged him to go with Remus to further his Mind Arts, Alistair could only travel so far from Hogwarts, though his range did cover the entirety of the British Isles. He had explained that as much as he was capable of teaching the Mind Arts as they were known to the Four Founders, Harry should get some exposure to different ideas and ways of working with them, along with other uses that he was incapable of teaching.

So the rest of the day passed in anti-social silence. He was still getting the strange flashes with his hearing, vision, and tactile senses, but they were no where near as bad as they were at Hogwarts. He could tell Nicolas and Perenelle wanted to talk to him about something, but they seemed to see he was in some sort of mood, and gave him some space.

He'd have to thank them for that tomorrow. And ask them if they knew anything about what was happening to him. He wasn't sure if he was going to talk about the dream though... It was just too bizarre for words.

Sitting at the table after breakfast the next day, Harry said, "Thanks for waiting to talk to me about... whatever it is you are going to talk to me about."

Perenelle smiled and said, "Well, we could tell that talking to you would be like talking to a brick wall. You really do have your mother's temperament. And that is not a compliment. Lily could be down right evil if you got her angry enough..."

Nicolas grimaced at that, and continued, "There is something that we do have to tell you, something that every magical, muggleborn or not, is informed of when they are first are given their letters before they turn eleven. We haven't told you yet because it has been a temporary non-issue."

Harry pinched the bridge of his nose, gave a long suffering sigh, and said, "Oh, goody. I thought I had already gotten caught up on general information everyone is supposed to know..."

Perenelle snorted, and said, "Yes, well since you had been under blocks for part of what we have to tell you about, it becomes slightly more of an issue now that it is coming back into the area of needed information. A young witch's or wizard's magic matures steadily with four exceptions. They under go... bursts of growth at on their birthday at the ages of seven, eleven, thirteen, and seventeen. Because you were under the aforementioned blocks for the first two, your next one, in a little under two months time, is going to be particularly long and more than a little painful."

Harry just shook his head and slumped down into the table, "Bloody hell. I blame Dumbledore, and no one is going to convince me otherwise... Any other news?"

Nicolas shook his head (not that Harry could see it given how he was sitting), and said, "Nope. Anything you want to talk to us about?"

Harry, face still down, said, "Yes, I have something I need to ask about... It's actually about a set of things that have been... strange about some of my senses. I've been hearing some sort of sub-audible... humming for lack of a better term. I'd call it a buzzing, but it is almost as if I can hear a tune. Then there is the fact that I sometimes feel this strange pressure on him, and I can feel it... vibrating sometimes. And when that happens when I hear the humming its almost like they are in synch. And last I keep seeing lights around objects and people, sometimes even with the things glow. It's been driving me batty."

Each of the Flamels stared at Harry in silence for a good two minutes. He had a feeling that he had just admitted to something that they understood, but did not expect. Oh, goody, this was going to be a fun conversation.

It was Nicolas who pinched the bridge of his nose this time, and he said, "Harry, you have just described, in as much detail as can usually be articulated, are the early stages of both Mage Sense and Mage Sight. One or the other are extremely rare abilities, but both? I can't think of anyone that has ever even admitted to having them both..."

Perenelle sighed and said, "It's a good thing you decided to go with Remus. The new ways of focusing that you will learn can help in learning to not let the Mage Sense drive you up the wall. At least, that is what the people who I've spoken to who have those particular gift."

Nicolas took this chance to get his own two knuts in, "And as for the Mage Sight, I know of someways to make it a bit more controllable, or at the very least comfortable."

Harry just nodded dumbly. He had some reading to do.

Harry spent the next week relaxing on the Flamel property. He idly read about his two new... talents, but there was little useful information about them. General overviews and descriptions were abound, but not much more.

He then left with Remus to Grimmauld Place to get ready for the trip. Their first stop would be to a compound deep in the Himalayan Mountain Range. The second would be a retreat of sorts for werewolves deep in the Black Forest.

The first place they would be visiting was described as something of a cross between a monastery, a scholarly retreat, and a frat house. The only reason Sirius was not coming was because there was both an extreme lack of women, and the fact that it was only one third frat house. It was a wizarding establishment, and placed in such a location in the Himalayas that it was deepest winter year round. But then again, with the place spelled like it was, they would only be cold if they went outside or opened a window, though they were warned that it could get a bit drafty. While it wasn't a place that catered to werewolves specifically, a few of them had found a way to curb the beast within there.

The second location was something along the lines of a wilderness retreat, except the accommodations were mostly for werewolves, with a number of safeguards in place for family members who were not infected. This was mostly a place for werewolves to swap tips and tricks on how they got through their worst time of the lunar cycle. There were a few werewolf masters of the Mind Arts who made this place their home, but most often the others just thought of them as drinking buddies.

So with that in mind, Harry and Remus went shopping for clothes suitable for a castle during a mild winter and the middle of summer. They then spent the next few days setting a few pranks that would go off before Sirius left for his own trip on Monday.

And then, on a Saturday afternoon, Remus introduced Harry to the cursed object that all wizards call an international portkey.

When they (finally) landed, Harry was praying for death to come and claim him. He had learned something about portkeys. They were not instantaneous travel. No, they travel at about at about a thousand miles per hour, but it isn't over quickly if you are traveling great distances. And all while you bloody spin like a top! It isn't all that many revolutions per minute, but you do start to notice it after a while.

And from merry old England to somewhere in the middle of the most godforsaken mountain range on the planet is around about forty-five hundred miles. Give or take a couple hundred miles. That is four and a half hours of spinning! Harry would have killed Remus for not warning him... If he could have gotten up from the floor.

All he could do was say, from his oh so wonderful spot on the ground, "Moony, I do not know when, and I do not know how, but I shall have my revenge, this I swear on the name of Prongs. I shall have vengeance!"

Harry was then told his second fun fact of the day, "Harry, I would have told you, but it didn't come to mind. Werewolves are generally immune to motion sickness."

All he could do was grumble as he was picked up and hauled off to where they were staying. He knew that he was going to get dosed with a mild sleeping potion to get over the time difference. Hopefully, he would be feeling more stable when he work up. And then Moony would pay.

Hauling himself into a sitting position, Harry was grateful that the world was no longer wobbling nor spinning. Checking his watch, and setting it for the correct time zone, he grinned. Remus was never up this early. So, he changed into something that hadn't been slept in, and started digging around his trunk for... supplies. He knew that Remus would be in a room connected to his.

He'd have to set up defenses after what he would do tonight.

After he had gotten into Moony's room, he was a little disturbed that the old wolf had not set up any spells or wards to ensure that nothing like what was going to happen to him would happen. Well, now in addition to revenge it was also just plain his fault. Marauders never sleep with anything less than one eye open. So this would be an object lesson in addition to payback.

So, after scrawling the work 'Neko' on his forehead using a permanent marker, changing his hair color to a rather vivid shade of pink with a combination of color changing and permanency charms,

and transfiguring his ears to more resemble Dumbo's than anything else, Harry started in on the wolf's clothes.

When he finally left the room, Remus's hand was stuck in a bowl of warm water. Harry had to resist the urge to cackle as he went back to his own room, and started laying down privacy, locking, and security charms on doors.

Of course, he had purposefully forgotten the silence charms, so while he had finally broken down and started on elective course work, and had started reading up on what he would be doing in Ancient Runes next year (mostly memorizing various runes, their meanings, and learning some history, which was going to make for a boring year in that class), he was pleasantly brought out of his concentration when Remus started yelling, screaming, and cursing. He put the book down, took the defenses around his door apart, and popped his head into the werewolf's room.

"Remus, you didn't even try to protect yourself last night. I would have only done one or two things if that was the case, but, figuratively speaking, your pants were down around your ankles and your ass was in the wind. You were asking for a response of this level."

The pink haired, elephant eared man just glowered at the twelve year old. His bed clothes had a pale purple tutu over them. He hadn't noticed the fuzzy bunny slippers yet apparently, because they hadn't been thrown into a corner and burned.

"Hey, I swore revenge, now I have had it. Oh by the way, fuzzy bunny slippers on you feet."

Harry removed himself from the room as the big bad werewolf dissolved into girlish screams of terror.

But then again the next few days were hell. And none of it was Moony's fault. Apparently the Mind Arts masters of this little place don't often get young prodigies of the art coming to visit. So after the three who were in residence poked around his defenses for a few

hours... each... they started playing rock, paper, scissors to see who would get a crack at him first.

Unfortunately for Harry, Master Shu was the winner. And the sadist was of the opinion that the mind cannot be trained without training the body. More specifically, he meant training the body in the Chinese martial arts.

And so that was how Harry ended up on his back in a training room three days later. He was seeing stars, and wondering just why Fate had sought to make his life into a combination joke/horror story. Well at least he was getting a chance to practice his Mandarin. But Master Shu had been quite surprised about, and most pleased with, was that Harry had known how to fall correctly. It allowed him to 'get on with the fun stuff'.

Harry was quite certain that the reason Remus had not even taken a minor shot at payback at him was that the old man felt bad for Harry. Harry felt bad for Harry. And Harry almost never felt bad for himself. Oh the humanity!

So, with him contemplating whether or not getting back up off the floor would do him any good, the current bane of his existence stood over him. Master Shu couldn't help but remind Harry of Pat Morita, so much so that he could have been a body double for the actor.

And the man knew it. Never mind the ridiculous fact that a Chinese national would use Japanese honorifics when speaking in English.

"Very good, Daniel-san. Get up now, lots of work to be done."

And so Harry hauled himself up, muttering a few off color words in French, and continued to get this particular lesson pounded into him.

On Sunday, Harry was lying on his bed, contemplating the ceiling. Not that he could do much more than that. His whole body hurt. And it would heal itself over night, and then Master Shu would make it hurt all over again. There was a lot he loved about magic, but the fact that he could take this much of a pounding added a definite bad thing to the list about how he felt about it.

And there was Remus standing at his door. Laughing. If he could have moved either of his arms he would have cursed the man.

"Laugh it up, fuzzball."

"Hey, you do know that you could be on a beach right now with Sirius?"

"I know. But I am learning something, and it is not the fact that I don't have to be aware of a part of my body for it to hurt."

Remus stopped his chuckling and took a seat in a chair near Harry's bed. "Do tell."

"Well, for me to even start to actively use my Occlumency, I have to relax. I've gotten to the point of not being in a meditative state to access my memories, but I still have to sit still and focus, blocking out most of the world."

Remus nodded, that was indeed how most of the intermediate Occlumens recalled information. Though he only knew this from talking with them. He'd never been able to get past the basics himself.

"What Master Shu is doing... The closest I can put it is that I am focusing without concentrating. It's not easy, and I can't hold it for longer than a few seconds, but it is happening. He isn't just teaching me how to fight unarmed, he's talking a lot about how to be clear and focused without even trying... It is almost as hard to explain as it is to actually do."

Remus just looked a little surprised by this. The man could have gotten three or four Masteries except the UK Ministry of Magic and those of most of Europe had laws against werewolves having more than N.E.W.T.s. There were a number of things that took an inordinate amount of focus when you got into some of the deeper ends of the various disciplines of magic.

If Harry could actually achieve what he was talking about, his ability to pull highly difficult magics would make Dumbledore look like a bumbling student, once Harry had enough knowledge to go along with the focus.

"The really upsetting thing is the three Mind Masters have divided my six weeks here solely between the three of them. And I'm with this one until Saturday, god help me."

Remus smiled sadly at Harry. He'd heard about how enthusiastic the 'Mad Monk' was, but he was really going to have to see if he could do something for Harry. He hadn't come here just to study the Magics of the Mind.

And so, while Harry spent the next week learning with the rather overzealous Mind Arts martial artist, Moony continued his routine with a slight modification. He had spent most of his time so far talking with the residents who focused on the fields he was interested in, with a few visits to each of those that focus on the Mind Arts, but now, instead of just talking shop, he asked if they there was any help that they could give a student who could sleep through classes of one of the premier magic schools of the world and still come out at the top of his class.

The result was a little overwhelming.

Most of the residents of the compound knew that Harry Potter was currently visiting. Usually the only people who were allowed to enter the halls were those with (or in the case of European Werewolves could have) at least two Masteries. But given the combination of the young man's fame, his own stellar academic records, and the fact the Mind Masters in residence wanted to spend as much time possible with him, the group as a whole had allowed him entry.

The other two Mind Arts workers had already been sternly told at the Wednesday weekly group meeting/kegger that Potter would not be driven into the ground by them. Everyone else knew that trying to reign in Master Shu was like trying to tell the tide to stop.

When Harry had finally collapsed onto his bed on the second Saturday at the compound, he was praying for someone to come and put him out of his misery. Master Shu had gotten him up after only two hours of sleep. Even on his best day, Harry still needed a good three hours of sleep, and he had often been sleeping five

because of the sheer battering this raving psychotic had been giving him.

He had then been worked physically and mentally until he had dropped, then a rejuvenation potion was poured down his throat, and it started over again. Lather, rinse, and repeat until one Potter is finally allowed to go to his room shortly after midnight.

For the first time in about a year, Harry slept for a full eight hours.

With his whole body stiff, Harry wondered if the next Mind Master could be anywhere near as bad as the first. He also wondered how Remus was doing. The full moon was coming up on this Saturday, the third of July.

Harry spent the rest of his day rather twitchy. He half expected to be tackled by the next person who wanted to drum as much about their beloved mind arts as they could into him in as little time as possible. Even if he had been inclined to speak with any of the Masters of other fields of study, he just wanted to give his body and mind a rest.

He hoped the next on the list would be kinder than the first.

The next morning, as Harry was listlessly eating his porridge, a very large man, wearing one of those Russian fur caps with the ear flaps... and ushanka Harry thought it was called, sat down across from him, and said in English with a thick Russian accent, "Hallo, I am Vladimir Demidenko, and for at least two hours a day for the next two weeks, you are mine."

Harry blinked. His thoughts derailed in a catastrophic train-wreck. In soviet Russia mind teaches you!

Pulling himself together, he was thankful that this one wasn't going to take every last hour of his time.

The relief must have been fairly evident on his face because the Russian said, "Ya, Shu is a madman. He doesn't often talk about the last time he taught anyone, but I once got him drunk enough on vodka that he mentioned screams of terror and fleeing like little girls.

Since you are still in this hemisphere, I think you passed. Come, let us discuss what you know of Occlumency."

What followed was four hours of questions, answers, and discussion. Harry really didn't mind it at all, at least he wasn't getting his ass kicked.

Now that he actually had free time, Harry finally found himself some time to talk with some of the other Masters who were present.

The first he actually got to spend any real amount of time with were a pair of Charms Masters, who just happened to be identical twins. They told him about the basics of wandless magic. About how, contrary to popular belief, that particular skill had absolutely nothing to do with raw power. They gave him a small book on the subject, and then started to drill him on what he knew of Charms.

They taught him a few useful charms that were the forerunners of animation charms. Instead of allowing statues and such to move as though they had joints, these charms simply programmed movements into an object. One of the primary uses would be to create makeshift target ranges. Which, they said, was exactly why they were teaching it to him.

He spent about a week working with them, and they added to his stockpile of useful spells.

The time he spent with Vlad over the next fortnight was mostly spent discussing some of the most advanced implementations of mental defenses. He spoke of how to create humanoid defenders, using figments from the subconscious to control them. He also talked about how one could 'use' the more advanced concepts from warding and enchanting, both of which had bases in the fields of Runes and Charms, to further improve both physical defenses and create more elaborate traps and distractions. He also spoke of how to use the spells for spacial expansion to further complicate the defenses.

Harry knew pretty damn well that he was years away from doing most of that crap.

For the second week of his time with the Russian, Harry spent his time away from the man with some of the Potions Masters and Mistresses. They pumped him for everything he knew on the subject, and in return he filled about one hundred pages of notes, which he kept in a journal he had for his potions work, with tips and tricks about how to get the most out of countless ingredients, ways to increase the potency of a number of potions, and other tidbits of information that would probably make Snivellus kill for that journal. They also gave him a set of stirring rods of various compositions, all of which could be set for specific stirring patterns, from simple clockwise and counterclockwise, to figure-eights and other even more complex ones.

With the end of the second fortnight, Harry had finally found some real enjoyment over the past few weeks. He still fled from Master Shu whenever he saw the man though.

The next, and final for this leg of the vacation, master was an Australian who was also a Transfiguration Mistress, Norma Dean.

She focused mostly on teaching Harry a number of techniques to get him in a far deeper meditative state than any he had gone it before. He found it exceptionally hard to clear his focus to the needed levels, because his Mage Sense would just not shut up.

She also went over how much Transfiguration he knew. After drilling him of all of his current knowledge, she worked on his speed and accuracy by using a set of rubber balls. She threw them towards him and he was to change the material of them in certain patterns of stones, woods, metals, and other materials. She also worked on the very basic rudiments on conjuration with him, working solely in wood, and having him conjure it in a variety of shapes and sizes.

He finally made a break through at the beginning of the second week of embracing the sensations given to him by his Mage Sense instead of trying, fruitlessly, to block it out. After two days of spending five hours plus a day in the deep meditation, he stumbled upon something that could only be called a maelstrom of energy and light.

His eyes opened with a gasp, and he fell over out of the chair he had been sitting in, and Norma was grinning like the Cheshire Cat. "I

see that you finally found your magical core, Harry. Usually when someone is advanced as you seem to be, they get it in a three or four days, you took almost nine. Any reason for that?"

"I was attempting to shut out my Mage Sense instead of embrace it... It was too distracting trying to ignore it."

She nodded. "So, can you describe your core? Shapes, colors, arrangements of energies, perhaps any elemental overtones?"

He closed his eyes and tried to remember what he saw and felt. "Shades of green, mostly the color of emeralds, with bright, burnished, glowing golds. And... it was chaotic, there was almost no order that could be seen at first glance. And it was a massive... vortex. And it was massive. That is the only way I can begin to describe it."

She nodded and then said, "Well then I can tell you a good thing, though you probably already know it, and a bad thing. The good thing is that from what you describe, you are probably already fairly powerful, and you haven't stopped growing yet. But as I said, you probably already knew. The bad news is that only the more ordered of magical cores are capable of great deals of wandless magic, so the farthest you are likely to get on that particular front is basic movement spells, hovering, summoning, banishing, remote manipulation, things like that. Everything else will just end up with you blowing your eyebrows off. Your core is both too chaotic and just too strong for anything else to happen."

Now he spent time in the basements of the complex, where a number of highly advanced charms and enchantments made for the perfect green houses. He took notes on all of the plants present, planning on giving a copy of the notes as a birthday present to Neville. There were magical flora from all over the world, and as a parting gift, the Herbologists gave him a chest with a number of seeds, seedlings, and cuttings held in stasis.

He'd have to see if they could thrive in his own greenhouses before he gave samples to Neville.

Norma then spent the remainder of the time they had working on teaching Harry how to work with his core. He could, to a currently unknown extent, organize and order his core. He had only a few

vague ideas, and Norma was generally clueless in regards to this, seeing as she had an extremely ordered core to begin with. She also told him about how he could consciously widen the 'link' between himself and his magic and so put even more power into his spells.

That thought scared him a little.

It was the night before they would be leaving for the Werewolf Retreat, and Harry was wandering the corridors of the compound. He hadn't been outside in six weeks, and he hadn't seen the sun in days. It was nearing midnight, and most of him wanted to go to bed, but there was a part that was restless at the international portkey that he would be taking the next day.

And when he turned down a corridor, he found himself staring down a massive black wolf. It was bloody huge. From snout to the base of its tail it had to be seven feet long, and was five feet tall at the shoulder. Harry froze at the sight of it, and said only four words, "Bloody hell, why me?"

The wolf sat back on its hind legs, cocked its head to one side, and Harry could have sworn it was grinning at him, if not laughing outright. He rolled his eyes and folded his arms over his chest.

"I'm glad that someone finds my life amusing."

The wolf nodded its head, and got back onto all four feet. It started to approach Harry, and seemed to be appraising him. When it got within a yard of him, it stopped and just stared. Neither of them moved for five minutes.

And then, Harry felt something in him... click, and then clearly heard, *You'll do. It has been a long time since I have bonded to a wizard, but they are almost always the most interesting of times. I am Leon, a Himalayan Shadow Wolf.*

With this, Harry blinked and shook his head, and said, "Yet another familiar? Fate hates me. That's all I can think of, Fate hates my bloody guts."

The wolf bloody grinned again, and he heard a chuckle in his head,
You're probably right on that fact. Come on, let's get you to bed, cub. You have an international portkey to catch tomorrow.

"Don't you mean we?"

Nope, I have my very own method of travel, like a few other extremely powerful magical creatures. But unlike most other creatures, my range is only limited to where there are shadows.

"I'll buy you a cow if you get me out of taking the portkey."

Deal.

A/N2: And that covers about the first half of Harry's summer. Things happen next chapter! But then again, things happened this chapter! MUHAHAHAH!

A/N: Once more, to the reviewers, my thanks! Now featured in over 100 communities!

Now I would like to put a general warning out to all of you who are reading this, three of the most terrible words of mankind's invention are about to be uttered.

I have plans.

Yes, we have reached the stage where I have actually had time to think about the plot. Still making it up as I go along, but now there is a general outline to it!

Be afraid. Be very afraid.

Familiar Speak :: ~Parseltongue~ :: ^German^

Chapter 27: The Black Forest Retreat

The next day, Harry was pacing about in the departure chamber as everyone present eyed the massive wolf that was laying down near by with various levels of fear. Remus had been more than a little concerned about the second deadly creature that had become Harry's familiar. But he had said nothing yet. Mainly because said familiar was present, and had all of the indicators that it was an alpha.

You don't anger an alpha that large. It is just not something that a living being can do and remain among the living.

When Harry had told everyone how he would be traveling there had been some some consternation, but it had eventually ended when Leon raised his head from the floor and growled. That shut everyone up.

Remus had left, and then Master Shu had rushed into the room, apparently hoping to catch them before they left. When he saw only Harry there, he was a little confused, but still elated.

"Here, these are for you. The crystal will, once a week, deliver a lesson in the martial arts directly to your mind. The dummy is a

training aid for you to spar against. Tap three times with wand. You'd better come back here for more training!" He handed a small wooden to Harry,

As he left immediately after giving these two gifts, Harry idly wondered when the last time he had a student who came back. He contemplated doing just that, knowing that he had long ago lost his sanity. He put the box in his bag, pulled out a book on Arithmancy, and sat down against Leon to wait the four and a half hours it would take for Remus's portkey to reach the Retreat in the Black Forest.

He doused all of the lights except the one he would use to read.

And while Harry was chilling with his new animal friend, the Ministry of Magic back in merry old England were loosing their heads. A prisoner had escaped. Escaped from Azkaban. It was impossible. No one had ever escaped from the most feared prison in the wizarding world!

The Wizengamot was up in arms, the DMLE was getting every Auror and Hit-Wizard they could to start searching, and Fudge was worried what this would do to his chances for reelection.

A Death Eater had escaped from the prison island of Azkaban.

Checking his watch, Harry rose to his feet. "Time's up. So, how do we do this Leon?"

The wolf gestured that Harry should climb on. That thought slowly wormed its way through Harry's thoughts. He was going to ride a massive black wolf. Now that was an image.

Doing as directed, Harry grabbed fistfuls of fur, careful not to yank any clumps out. Standing, Leon stretched, walked around the room a few times, and then bounded into the shadows. They came out into a wood walled room that had Remus working the kinks out from his portkey.

Harry climbed off of Leon, grinning. "Thanks for that Leon, I owe you one live cow."

Damn straight you do, cub.

"How was the trip, Remus?"

"Like any other international portkey, cub."

Harry could just grunt at this. Damn Remus's immunity to motion sickness. Damn it to hell. "Yeah, well let's get to wherever we are being lodged."

Harry hauled himself out of bed the next morning to Hedwig's trilling and Isis's weight upon his chest. Both she and Isis had absolutely no interest in going to the frozen mountain range, but they had decided that they would join Harry when he went to the Retreat in the Black Forest.

~Wakey, wakey Isis, I need you to get off of me.~

The snake, grumbling about losing its body temperature pillow, complied. Harry covered her back up with the blanket and cast a warming charm.

~There, rest well you lazy snake.~

Going into his trunk and getting his little box of herbs, he gave Hedwig a sprig of parsley.

Leon, from the large portion of the room he was taking up, said, "Hey what about me? You know you owe me a cow.*"

"I know, Leon. I'll talk to Remus and see what I can do about getting you your bovine. But you may very well have to wait until we either get to London, or even Hogwarts. I'm fairly certain with all the beasties Hagrid takes care of, he can do me the favor of buying a cow for me to give to you. I trust for the most part you are content to do your own hunting?"

Of course, I just want the bribe you promised me.

"And you shall receive, but next time make sure you get a delivery date."

I like your cunning, cub. We might be able to make something out of you yet.

"Only if I survive Leon, only if I survive."

It was three in the morning when Harry settled down against Leon's flank and started reading his linking book devoted to magical creatures, with a the search attuned to the more harmless creatures that comprised the third year curriculum.

The next morning, after kicking Remus out of the cabin's kitchen so he wouldn't burn breakfast by being there, Harry cooked up a halfway decent meal. He hadn't been forced to work in a kitchen in a little under two years, but he still managed to make something edible. This was going to be a long four weeks. Maybe he'd bribe Leon with a pig so he could make a trip to the Manor and get one of the kitchen house-elves. In fact...

Setting down food for himself and Moony, he said, "Remus would it be at all possible for me to order livestock?"

And the Marauder was struck dumb by this non sequitur in the midst of his first bite. His mouth working like a fish out of water. "And just why do you need livestock, cub?"

"Because I bribed Leon for the trip from the Himalayas with the offer of a cow, and I am hoping for a pair of pigs he'll be willing to take me to London to borrow one of the house-elves from the manor."

Remus blinked at this twisty bit of logic, and then grinned, "I think we can get our hands on two pigs and a cow..."

"We'll need the cow first, I doubt he'll do anything else before I get him his beef."

Remus just nodded and started planning. Harry was a decent cook, but Sirius had sought out the absolute best elves in the staffing of the Manor.

Harry knew that in this area the German Underage Magic laws were not in effect, and so he used a few of the basic household spells to clean up after the meal.

Harry was out in the sunlight several hours later, reading under a tree. Hedwig was perched on a low lying branch, Isis draped around his neck, and Leon was between him and the tree, reading over his

shoulder. It wasn't that he didn't want to deal with other people, he just didn't feel like doing more than reading.

Of course, the fact was give people someone seeking quiet, and you get someone who wants some action, ^Hey, you don't smell like a were. Why're you here?^

Looking up, he saw a boy about his age, with a mop of dark blonde hair and muddy brown eyes. ^My uncle is a were. So it's either be here or watch my godfather perv out at beaches around the world. And I don't do well with water.^

The boy harrumphed and took a seat on the ground nearby, ^What is with the menagerie?^

~I resemble that remark.~

"I knew leaving you and Hedwig with access to a television set was going to end poorly. No more Stooges for you, Isis."

^Hey, I barely understand English, and since you seem to speak perfectly fine German, why'd you change languages?^

^Sorry, I wasn't talking to you. Isis here was being a wise ass. As for the 'menagerie', they are my familiars.^

The boy blinked several times at that, worked his mouth like a fish (Harry briefly thought that he should try and get a patent on causing that response), and then shook his head. ^Remind me to never pick a fight when magic is involved with you.^

Harry shrugged and turned the page of his book, ^So, any particular reason you came over to interrupt what may have turned into a nice nap?^

^Yeah, everyone else was playing football and I wanted to see what was up with all the animals.^

Harry chuckled and said, ^I'm Harry.^

^Ivan.^

Over the next few days, Harry and Ivan hung out, talking about about what interested them (they were both fans of Quidditch, Ivan was only a semi-serious student, and Harry was not all that interested in hockey.) and even managed to get in a few rounds of paint dueling. They even managed to scrape together enough brooms and players to manage a Quidditch game at one point, where Harry had for a change of pace and lack of anyone wanting to play the position, subbed in at Chaser. Ivan played as Beater on the opposing side. He didn't do all that badly, but his team lost when the opposing Seeker got the snitch. At least it was only by a thirty point margin.

In the middle of the week, Remus led a large cow up to the cabin, and nodded at Harry, who went in search of Leon. The gruesome act, which could only be called a feeding frenzy, could not be watched for longer than a few seconds for either of those present.

Leon took Harry to London and back for only one pig, the cow having been so very tasty he said. Harry wasn't sure when the next time he would be able to eat beef would be. At least they had someone to cook the meals now.

That Thursday, while he was wandering around the grounds of the Retreat, Harry saw an old man sitting on a stone bench near a fire pit, who called to him, "You the Mind Arts Prodigy who they said would be visiting?"

Groaning internally, but knowing that it would be both rude, and probably useless, to run away, he took a seat across from the man. "Not unless a second one is running around here. So how much of my time are you going to demand?"

Taking a closer look at the man who was now laughing, he reminded Harry of Christopher Lee. And also made Harry think that he had watched one too many movies last summer. He just had to go to the movies every third day.

Well the Dursleys had never allowed it, and anything that the Dursleys had allowed Dudley and forbidden him had to be fun.

"No, no, young man, I'll only teach you as much as you want to be taught. So, would you mind filling me in on what you know?"

So, Harry spent the next couple of hours once more going over just about everything he knew about the defensive and constructive mind arts. The old man shook his head when he went over the theory only lessons he had been given.

"You have a heavy grounding in most of what you'll ever need to know, and you have come to the correct assumption that once you reach a certain point in your learning, you will need to rebuild everything from the ground up. What I think will best serve you right now is teaching you how to harness your instinctual mind and more animalistic characteristics. Have you started to learn the Animagus transformation yet?"

Harry shook his head.

"Well, if and when you do, you'll find what I can teach you to give you a few advantages in learning it, and if you manage a large degree of proficiency... well let's just say you won't have very many issues learning to control it. So, would you like some lessons?"

Harry nodded his head excitedly.

"Alrighty then, I am Jack O'Neill, and listen well, as I will only say things once, for reasons that will be obvious to any Occlumens of your ability."

The next day and a half that followed were mostly lectures on how to tap into and direct the sections of Harry's mind that focused with the more animal side. It was explained how these were much stronger in werewolves as a matter of what they were, and that it gained strength with both the uses that he would eventually teach Harry and with the tapping of the Animagus ability.

However, on that Saturday, July Thirty-First, Harry had no idea what he would be doing, if anything... The first magical maturation he would ever go through was not going to be fun. Remus had told him that as a Marauder he wouldn't be going far from the cabin in case Harry needed him.

Harry went to bed that night more than a little fearful, but Hedwig sung him to sleep, and Leon bid him goodnight saying, *Rest, cub, I shall hold the watch until you awake.*

Waking up the pitch black room, Harry felt like Fred and George had used him for target practice (and he had been unable to evade). Groaning, he heaved himself up so that he was sitting on the edge of the bed. He still had his eyes closed, but he cracked one open to check the alarm clock. It said one in the afternoon, and the things he had been seeing with his Mage Sight had become sharper and more defined.

"Bloody hell."

Isis slithered her way around Harry's feet, saying, ~I was so worried! You were tossing and turning all night, and then you didn't get up when you normally do. And now you are not moving so well!~

~I'll be fine Isis. I may have to take it easy for a few days, but I should be just fine.~

He canceled the method he had learned to drown out his Mage Sense, and it was no longer an assault on his mind. It was as if someone had filtered out the static of a badly tuned radio station. He could feel the presence of each of his familiars, and each was a different melody with a different pressure against his skin.

He could also hear another magical presence in the common room of the cabin. It was probably Remus. And, just barely, he could make out his own presence, though he could only hear what would be the heaviest bass notes of it.

Prying his eyes open, he could clearly see the auras around each of his companions, and the minor threads of errant magic running through the air.

Stumbling out of the room and dropping himself down into a seat at the table, Harry said, "Food please."

Remus gave Harry a once over and said, "I had Zinny keep you some food warm from breakfast. Now, do you want that or lunch?"

"Breakfast first, then lunch. I'm starved."

The aforementioned House-elf came out bearing a tray, and Harry dug in.

Harry spent the rest of that day and the one following resting. On Monday, he and his familiars were then moved, along with everyone else present who wasn't a werewolf, to a building that was more of a bunker than anything else. He was still recovering, so he spent most of his time either reading while sitting against Leon, or curled up taking a nap snuggled up with the giant wolf.

All of the 'normal' witches and wizards present were a more than a little unnerved with such behavior around what would normally be an extremely dangerous creature.

The day after things were quiet as the Werewolf population rested, and Harry continued to do the same. He had finally stopped aching all over that morning, and though he was a little lethargic, he figured he'd mostly be back to normal in time for the rest of the population of the retreat returning to normal tomorrow.

And he was, though he knew he would be careful not to push himself to much. He talked with Ivan for a while about schools (Harry was of course a student of Hogwarts, and Ivan went to Durmstrang) and his lessons with Jack that day finally started to yield results.

However the result was the vague feeling that he was poking a tiger with a feather. When he mentioned that to Jack, he was told to be very careful when proceeding. Usually when non-weres described something like that, it meant that the form their animalistic and instinctive side took was an apex predator, and it needed to be awoken carefully and befriended, rather than controlled.

Harry asked why he would have to befriend an extension of himself. Jack's answering grin was more than a little frightening. The werewolf then went on to explain how to skip most of the steps that he had laid out in harnessing this part of himself, but that it would only work if Harry was absolutely, positively certain of what he had just said.

Harry had noticed something so far in his dealings with Jack, and he couldn't help but ask at the end of the lesson, "Why are you in such good spirits when most of the others here are still limping and moping?"

"Because, young Harry, as a Mind Master, I am the in control of my mind. Always. On Monday, I was in total control of myself without the Wolfsbane Potion."

Harry blinked at that, it was fairly close to something he had read about, something that was a bit of a myth, and the holy grail of werewolves. But it couldn't be. The last mention of anyone being even close was in a two hundred year old history text talking about a werewolf in the thirteen hundreds.

"Just how close are you to becoming a Lycan?"

Jack just smiled sadly and said, "That's impossible for me. I am a minor talent when it comes to magic, and all of the research I've done, and there is very little, points to the werewolf needing to be well above average when it comes to both power and control."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be Harry. That you even know about it says something about the resources you have access to, and your ability to research. Now come, let's see if you can skip several months of tedious work and get within a stone's throw of mastering this aspect..."

A person was hiding in the middle of a forest. In the person's hands was a newspaper. Eyes locked on the headline and the accompanying picture, this person was apparently unaware of their surroundings.

A mess of tangled hair and filthy robes, the person looked like they had been put through hell.

The paper had a picture of a twelve year old boy posing with a sword against the corpse of a massive snake.

By weeks end, Harry had a dozen animals wandering around his mental defenses, and the defenses themselves were a bit prone to slight alterations that would make breaching the inner mind even harder.

Jack, though he would never say it out loud, wondered if Harry would be capable of the negating all of the disadvantages of being a werewolf if he ever had the misfortune of being infected. Half of him

hoped it would never happen. The other half couldn't help but wonder.

But, he had taught Harry the basis of everything he needed to, but if Harry ever had any questions, he encouraged the young man to write.

On Sunday, Ivan had managed to arrange a large scale paint duel, but the only way he had managed that was if he and Harry were teamed up against the seven others who would be participating. Harry didn't like it, but he agreed. He had been itching to try his Mage Sense out in a situation like this, but he had hoped the odds would be a little closer to two on one instead of three and a half on one.

It was nearing the end of the second hour of the duel. Those seven would just not give up. Two of them were splattered with enough paint that if it had been anything even remotely resembling a real duel, they would have long been hexed into a coma or worse. Three more would have probably been down for the count. The remaining two were less marked...

But nothing compared to Ivan and Harry. They had been hit maybe three dozen times altogether, with the majority on Ivan. Nobody had managed to sneak up on Harry yet, and the hits that he did get was when they managed to set up a crossfire.

^Ivan, are you getting tired of this too?^

^Yeah.^

Harry then yelled, after a quick sonorous, ^Come on and just admit defeat. It's been two hours and we're getting bored.^

Someone replied, ^We'll be willing to call it a draw!^

Harry shared a look with his companion and replied, ^Never!^

The duel carried on for another half an hour before the other team finally admitted defeat.

The next day, sitting beneath his favorite tree, Harry was reading. As usual.

Harry had been thumbing his way through the journals of all the previous Lord Potters, and after having gone through the three most recent sets, he had come to a conclusion. He hated politics. Absolutely despised them.

Just the thought of being involved with the people his forefathers describe made him feel ill. And from the general tones of the writing so far, most of them didn't like it either.

"Bah, humbug."

The next day, Harry was sitting at a picnic table, idly scratching out runes on a piece of parchment. He was going to have to figure out whether mental image based inscription spells interfered with the working of empowered runes. It was something that seemed like it was at least worth looking into.

His musing were interrupted when a woman sat down across from him. She had dark brown hair, and bright blue eyes. She had a dreamy look on her face that he had come to associate with Luna when she was describing some of those creatures she was so fond of.

"I am Anora Wayland. Jack spoke well of how you were capable of learning. There is one major flaw in Occlumency, and it is not well known because the method of attack is so rarely used. Everyone just assumes that it protects everything. I was disabused of this notion decades ago, and had to work very hard to uncover what I needed to know.

"An Occlumens fortifies their conscious mind against active intrusion, but it builds no such defenses for when the mind is attacked while it dreams. And since even the most accomplished in the Mind Arts still need to sleep, no matter how little it is, they are still vulnerable to attack.

"This will not be easy to learn. There will not be a short cut of sheer belief and acceptance like with what Jack taught you. If you do accept learning from me, I will be able to give you the most basic exercises for beginning to understand your sleeping mind, but it will be months, if not longer, before you will be able to even begin to

protect yourself on that front. And it will be even longer before you are able to use the concepts that protect you while you sleep in your waking mind."

Harry simply nodded. If there was a hole this massive... that wasn't a good thing.

She then started explaining just what he would be doing. He would attempt to go to sleep while meditating each night. He would continue to do this, no matter how many times he failed. He would start writing out journals about just what he dreamed. She explained how to focus and enter a lucid dreaming state if he realizes he is dreaming.

She then told him that all he would be doing with her would be taking notes as she explained just how to fortify, weaponize, and even militarize one's dreams. These concepts would be entirely different than waking Occlumency, in part because all dreams are different and so any set defenses would be reset with each different dream. What instead would happen would be teaching the subconscious to react to any foreign presence with violence, and teaching the mind to come to lucidity when such a break in occurs.

She then explained that lucidity was the ultimate defense in the dreamscape. When a Mind Master dreams and is aware of those dreams, anyone who dares tread in their domain is in for trouble the likes of which they never expected. The dreams would bend to their will, and make even the most vicious animalistic shields look like a new born kitten.

The remaining time at the Retreat passed quickly. No one else wanted to go up against either Ivan or Harry, and so the three paint duels they ended up doing were between each other. They managed to scrape together one more Quidditch game, and this time Harry flew as Seeker, while Ivan was Keeper on the same team as he was. This time they won, hands down. Harry's record, as far as it came to playing Seeker, remained unbroken.

Finally the day before the return to London came. Harry was sitting out in front of the cabin, idly leafing through a what he had studied of Arithmancy. He was going to be slightly bored in that class this year, in addition to the expected boredom in Runes. Most of it would

comprise of learning which numbers have magical properties, and getting the class onto the same page when it came to mathematics.

Considering that he was still self studying what he could from the muggle education system, and he was busy muddling his way through calculus, he doubted he would have very many issues. Ivan sat down across from Harry, and said, ^You know, I never asked after your last name.^

Harry grunted, and said, ^Yeah, well, not really fond of the attention my name brings.^

^Well, well, neither am I. I'll tell you mine, if you tell me yours.^

^Potter.^

Ivan blinked a few times, and then said, ^Well, I wasn't really expecting that. Potter, as in The-Boy-Who-Lived, Potter?^

^The one, the only, and Fate's favorite plaything. Now, what's yours?^

^Krum.^

^I assume you are some how related to the Bulgarian National Team Seeker if you dislike the attention that name gets you?^

^Yup. He's my elder brother.^

^Well, it has been enjoyable getting to know you, Ivan. What would your opinion be on trading letters through the school year?^

^I wouldn't mind it all.^

A/N2: Yes, I borrowed the first Werewolf Mind Arts teacher's name from Stargate. There is a good reason. Richard Dean Anderson is awesome. 'Nuff said.

And yes, I gave Krum a younger brother. Who is a werewolf. Deal with it, I needed a character and I wanted the option of bringing him back later, without needing to reach too far for him or her.

For the record, in my AU Germany is one of the few countries in Europe that doesn't have laws that discriminate against werewolves, along with both Sweden and Norway, and that Durmstrang has measures for werewolf students.

Next chapter will cover the last portion of summer and a chunk of the first month or two of the school year.

Part of me is really, really tired of proofreading. I have found I really do not like proofreading. Besides which I'm in the middle of reading something, so I'll put this up now, and proof it later. Feel free to point out any glaring errors to me.

A/N: Again, and as always, thanks for the reviews.

Now with two comments, yes I did pull it from 'Dune'. Landsraad, the body that represented the ruling Great Houses in the Imperium. I just butchered it a bit when I wanted to have a screen name and couldn't remember exactly how it was spelled. And poof, something (mostly) unique.

I really should figure out how what category this falls under. I know it is at least one part humor... but everything else, I have no clue.

But I digress. On with the show!

Chapter 28: The Dementors of Hogwarts

Harry slid off of Leon, looking around the dark room of the Manor.

"Yes, Leon, I'll get you the seven chickens as soon as I can when we get to Hogwarts."

The wolf just looked at the teen.

"How do I know that there will be chickens at Hogwarts? Because Hagrid had roosters that were killed by whoever Riddle was using as a meat-puppet last year."

Nodding, the wolf shrunk to what would be a size more suitable to moving around the Manor... or Hogwarts. Harry gave him a dirty look.

"You know what, I'm not even going to ask why you stayed as the more massive version for the past four weeks. It'd probably give me a headache."

Pinching the bridge of his nose, he went to look for Sirius, who, if Harry remembered correctly (and he always remembered correctly), should have gotten back three days ago. Knowing how the Marauder had put off more important things to go to his beaches, he would probably be in the office attached to the Master Suite.

So hauling his backside up to the top floor, he knocked on Padfoot's door, and entered when he heard the man bellow that he was decent. Making his way to the office, Harry pulled a nearby chair to face the Head of the House of Black.

"So, why so serious?"

Padfoot groaned and turned toward his godson.

"I do not know why, but only Potters seem to be able to pull off that pun without cracking up. I don't know why."

"My theory is that we all have some form of hereditary insanity."

Sirius just stared at the teen, whose hair was still black with lots of red, but was back to its normal length.

"Hey, I picked up another familiar while at our first stop. It only took me a few days to adjust to the fact that I now had a giant shadow wolf that would follow me around for the rest of my unnatural life."

All the man did in response to this was quirk an eyebrow.

"So what are you working on, Sirius?"

"... Why are you interested?"

"I'm bored and don't want to go to the Alley until tomorrow. I don't feel like studying, I know it is a shock, I'm too wired to practice my spellcasting, which still hasn't completely recovered from having a basilisk fang slammed through my forearm, flying might be an option, but I actually want to be in the real sky than a basement. So that leaves either talking to you or my familiars. I'd prefer human company."

The Marauder shrugged, and said, "I'm going over the invoices of everything the House gained from the Malfoys and Lestranges."

"Paperwork?" Harry's face scrunched in thought for a moment, "I could do some paperwork. Want some help?"

Sirius blinked. Maybe Harry was right about the hereditary insanity. No sane person wanted to do paperwork. "Help yourself pup. Need to talk to you about something, though."

Picking up a folder and readjusting his glasses, Harry said, "I have a feeling this will be an unpleasant conversation."

"Indeed. There was a break out from Azkaban."

"I'm not going to say that that should be impossible. No prison is foolproof, and anyone that believes so is a fool themselves."

"Anyway, the escapee was a Death Eater. Hasn't been caught yet."

"And you are bringing this to my attention, because? There are plenty of," he made a set of quotes with his fingers, " 'pardoned' Death Eaters hanging around and none of the threats to my life have come from them."

"Yeah, well this escapee wasn't all too stable when she went in. And the Aurors have theorized that she could have one of two targets."

"One of which I assume is me."

"Yup. The other is Neville."

Harry blinked at that, and then said, "So it was Bellatrix, huh?"

Sirius just stared dumbfounded at Harry.

"There were very few female Death Eaters that ended up in Azkaban. Hell, there were few known female Death Eaters, period. There is only one known that would have any reason to go after a Longbottom. Ergo, the escapee is in all likelihood, Bellatrix Black, formerly Lestrage. Am I correct?"

"You are indeed pup. So, the Minister, in his infinite wisdom, is putting Hogwarts under guard until she is caught. The guard will consist almost solely of Dementors."

"Do you know how many?"

"One hundred fifty-seven."

"That is almost the entire garrison of the fortress, with only enough left over for a skeleton crew. What the hell is Fudge think... wait never mind. He's covering his ass, can't let his popularity rating slip too low... Oh this is interesting, Malfoy had a thirteen percent interest in the Prophet. The Lestranges had a seven..."

"Black has fifteen."

"Hrm... Need to talk to Griphook, see how much the Potters have. We might be able to get a controlling interest in the paper without too much of a fuss. Maybe then they could actually be made to print truth instead of rumors and gossip."

"Good idea. Oh by the way, Nicolas and Perenelle are going to be here for dinner on Wednesday."

Harry grunted and then the pair worked in silence for another ten minutes, and then a sound of sheer disgust ripped from Harry's throat.

"What's wrong pup?"

"There is a... stockpile, for lack of a better word, of attuned potions, all designed to inhibit a person's free will in some way shape or form. It's like reading the pharmacy list for some twisted healing regime. And from what I'm reading, they've been under preservation charms..."

"That makes me wonder two things. One easy, one difficult. Which House did they come from, and who was the poor soul they were attuned to?"

The trip to Diagon Alley was quick and painless. Harry's Hogwarts letter was waiting for him, a mail redirection having been placed for the duration of the trip. His friends knew that he would be out of touch for the duration of the summer, so that only post he had waiting for him were official correspondence from the school and Gringotts and the massive stack of Daily Prophets. He knew he had forgotten something. And that something had been a hold on his subscription.

His reading had turned over to a new focus. In his search for inscription spells, he had come up with what could very well be an extremely brilliant and time-saving idea. A couple of ideas actually, that if they all worked together like he thought they should... Well, he would probably spend a couple days bouncing off the walls if it did.

Dinner on Wednesday went over well. The talk mostly centered on their various trips, though Nicolas and Perenelle had remained in the country. Harry smiled faintly as Sirius tried to pull attention away from the fact that his trip was about seeing beautiful young women in bathing suits. Remus avoided touching on the real reason he had taken his trip. Harry idly spoke about what he had learned.

After dinner, Nicolas pulled Harry aside and handed him a potion and a small box.

"I want to warn you. What the potion does is going to hurt. Badly. But I am certain you will like the results."

Harry stared darkly at the vile vial he was holding for a moment, he put the box down on a nearby table, shrugged, and downed it in one gulp.

He was driven to his knees moments later, clutching his face in pain. He was vaguely aware of someone screaming. It may very well have been him. It felt like something was melting his eyes.

And it was over as quickly as it began. He was lying in a heap on the floor, panting and sweating. Everything seemed fuzzy. Like how the world looked when he had his glasses off.

But he had his glasses on... And then a thought wormed its way into his head.

He sat up, taking his spectacles off. He could see!

He then turned to Nicolas, confused.

"The fix for the Mage Sight needed your normal vision corrected. In the box is a pair of glasses that will block your Sight. The biggest problem was that the glasses couldn't have any form of vision correction on them, magical or mundane. So..."

"You fixed my eyes. Thanks. Still hurt like hell."

"I warned you. Just imagine if you had the pain tolerance of a normal person."

"I can see why there are still glasses in the wizarding world."

And September First came. Harry had finally stopped having headaches with the addition of the Sight-blocking glasses. He had always assumed it was something along the lines of a minor case of sensory overload. Even if his Mage Sense wasn't bombarding him anymore, he could still feel all the energy around him.

He wondered how bad it would be when he got to Hogwarts. He hadn't been back to the Alley since he had gotten the glasses, and that was the only place he could think of that would have anywhere near the magic of Hogwarts.

He'd just have to play it by ear.

He was one of the first on the platform, as always. He liked being early, having his choice of compartments, being able to get comfortable before the train filled with humanity. He also had gotten his Hogsmeade permission slip signed by Nicolas.

Leon had taken the space on the floor by the window, and Harry was in the seat there, his boots off and was sitting cross-legged. He had his backpack in his lap, and was idly double checking the contents. He had all of his set linking books, a few emergency potions he had taken to packing, and a then an ungodly amount of chocolate, all kept under cooling charms.

If Hogwarts was playing host to the majority of the Dementor garrison, it probably wasn't enough chocolate.

He pulled out a linking book bound to 'magical beings'. "Dementors."

He started reading.

The train was pulling from the station, and his friends had all frozen for an instant at seeing his newest familiar. But having been confronted by a basilisk last year as his newest companion, they got over quick. Well, everyone except Luna. She had scratched Leon behind the ears and serenely taken a seat.

Harry idly thought that whatever brand of insanity he had seemed to be spreading. But then again, Luna had her own brand of crazy.

Neville had gotten there first, and they had a quick conversation concerning Bellatrix. They both hoped that there would be no restrictions on their Hogsmeade visits, but that it was entirely possible 'for their own protection'.

Harry only half minded. He had had the twins making purchases from the village for him from halfway through the first year, and what they couldn't get he could owl-order. Neville was a little more upset at the possibility. He wanted to actually be able to go down to the village.

Hermione rattled off half a dozen facts about the village when they talked to her about it. The more people change the more they stay the same. It was actually almost endearing when you got used to it.

The Ferret failed to make his yearly appearance. Harry idly wondered how the poverty (as the Malfoys saw it, even though they were still fairly well off by the standards of most of the wizarding world) was treating him.

Instead they got a visit from the Weasel.

"Well, well, if it isn't Scarhead and the other freaks of Gryffindor, honestly how anyone can stand being in the same House as you lot, I don't know. I mean, who in their right mind as animals following them around? And the near-squib Longbottom, don't even get me started on that. There is of course the castle's resident know-it-all bookworm. And Loony Lovegood. If I must say..."

Harry turned the page of his book as everyone else in the compartment sent a different hex at Ronald. And if his senses were right, a pair more came from out in the corridor. Of course, he was proven right as Fred and George stepped over their brother.

"George, I cannot believe..."

"... that we are related to that git."

Harry took a moment to memorize just how each twin registered to his Mage Sense. He was sure as hell not going to miss a chance to tell the difference between the two. He'd take a few weeks to figure it out, make sure he could tell them apart in his head, but once he could...

A grin graced his face as turned another page.

Rain had been lashing the window for the past hour. And for some reason the train was starting to slow down. That wasn't right, they were will an hour out from the station.

This couldn't be good.

And it got worse as the train stopped entirely and the lights went out. Moments later, Harry was muttering a quick spell and flicking half a dozen spheres of softly pulsating light into the air. He felt something akin to frost creeping up the outside of his mental shields.

He felt the bottom fall out of his stomach, as they sat in silence for a few minutes. Harry could almost feel ice growing on his mental barriers, worming its way through the minute gaps in his defenses. He quickly tagged any areas that were more than the smallest cracks. He'd deal with the two or three later. He had a gut feeling about what had made its way onto the train.

And he was right as a Dementor made its way to the door of the compartment and started to open it. The ice thickened when the thing came into sight. Harry made a few mental notes about the being, theories and facts. From everything he had read, the Ministry should have been looking for a means of destroying these things instead of employing them.

"For Dementors glory in fear, death, and decay; and dwell in the dank and dark. Destroyers of happiness and devourers of souls."

He also felt frost spreading from a number of memory containers in his inner mind. He made a quick list of which ones would need better containment.

He could see the color draining from the faces of his friends. His wand was still out from his setting of the light spells. So he stood, sub-vocally setting a high-power fire spell at the ready. His wand tip lit with bright blue flames. He felt his shields groan under the weight of the Dementor's presence, felt his worst memories working their way to the forefront of his mind. He had to act quick, or he'd be incapacitated quickly. He really needed to learn the Patronus.

He leveled his wand at the demon. "None of us are hiding Bellatrix Black here. Leave now, or I get to test my theory on whether or not your kind can stand up to ridiculously overpowered high-tier fire spells."

The hood of Dementor's cloak moved from pointing at Harry's face, to his burning wand tip, and back to his face. It turned and left. Harry barely made his way back to his seat before he collapsed. In a few minutes the lights were back on and the train was moving again.

Everyone in the compartment looked like they had just gotten over the flu.

Hermione was the first to break the silence, "I can't believe they are setting those... things around a school!"

Harry grunted his disconsolately, canceled both the fire spell and the orbs of light, "Well belief it. From what I could track in the papers, the announcement that the Dementors would be stationed at Hogwarts followed shortly after the Minister's approval rating had dropped a total of ten points since the break out. Sirius agrees with me on the belief that he thought he needed to be seen doing something."

He then started tossing everyone a bar of chocolate.

Neville had a grim smile as he said, before taking a bite of chocolate, "Only you, Harry, would threaten to torch a Dementor."

"Hey, I lacked the one spell proven to work against them, but from all I've read, no one has tried the 'Kill it with fire' approach to those things. From its reaction I don't think it has either."

Harry was slumped at the Gryffindor table, waiting for the Sorting, and by extension the Feast, to start. McGonagall had grabbed Hermione for one reason or another. His list of most hated things in the world had gotten a new occupant, and it had debuted at number two. God, he hated Dementors. He looked up at the head table and stared.

And then he spoke, "Why the Hell is Sirius sitting at the head table?"

That brought the rest of the rather shell shocked group back to the present and they stared at their apparently new teacher.

This wasn't going to end well. Former Auror Sirius may have been, but there was no way in hell that this was going to end well. Harry felt bad for the poor firsties.

And speaking of firsties, McGonagall was leading them in, Hermione was taking a seat across from him, and the hat was singing its song:

(Once more, another song

I cannot write verse to save my life

let us move along)

Harry watched with his normal passive interest (he'd remember who was who if nothing else, and given a few firsties had approached him for homework help last year after he was caught helping Luna, it was amusing when he had called them by name), and applauded when they got new Lions, and then cheered when the last one was sorted.

Dumbledore made his normal inane pre-food speech. And then Harry ate like a man who had been lost in the wilderness. Having gotten most of the summer catch-up done on the train, his friends spoke mainly about how much of a horror it would be with the less mature Marauder teaching Defense.

When the food was finally gone, Dumbles gave his real announcements. Professor Sirius Black (Moony looked to be chuckling while he had a look of horror on his face, Harry didn't know how he managed that) would be taking over Defense, and Professor Wilhelmina Grubbly-Plank was taking over for Professor Kettleburn, who had retired to spend quality time with his remaining limb, along with Assistant Professor Hagrid.

Now who's bright idea was that? Even Harry was afraid of some of the beasts that Hagrid called cute, and he had the least sense of self-preservation out of the entire student body. At least he wasn't in charge, so they probably wouldn't be seeing anything too deadly. Yet.

Harry had caught up with Alistair last night, and though they still had most of Harry's summer to speak about, they could do that at their leisure. The Hat was very grumpy about the Dementors, but neither he nor the castle had access to the kind of firepower needed to run the things off, short of throwing up the siege wards. And Hogwarts had immediately shot down that suggestion when Al had made it.

At breakfast the next morning, Harry saw just how cramped his class schedule was. He had been expecting it, but in the end he only had one hour off of classes a day, except on Fridays.

One Fridays he had two.

He wondered if he would undergo a mental breakdown when O.W.L.s rolled around. He hoped not. If standardized testing sent him comatose how the hell would he handle the Dark Tosser?

The only thing he objected to was having Potions first thing on Thursdays. Today was a Thursday.

He'd survive, he just wouldn't be happy about it. But then again, Leon was here under the table getting passed the occasional strip of bacon (note to self, talk to Hagrid in regards to owed chickens), maybe he could be talked into coming to potions... Maybe he would be happy about it.

Harry was grinning from ear to ear after Potions. None of the more git-like Snakes were willing to even think about sabotaging his work when he had a wolf heeling him.

Professor Vector, teacher of Arithmancy, had passed out a test very first thing. It ranged from basic arithmetic to some fairly heavy algebra. Harry demolished the test, figuratively of course, and handed it back. He was told to read his textbook for the remainder of class.

Instead he watched who he shared the class with. There was Hermione, of course, and she was the only other Gryffindor in the room. There were also only two Hufflepuffs in the room, Susan Bones (wonder if she was any relation to the director of the DMLE) and Justin Finch-Fletchley (he had always seemed a little pompous). There were three Slytherins present along with three Ravenclaws. The scaly contingent consisted of Daphne Greengrass, Tracey

Davis, and Blaise Zabini (which Harry firmly believed was a girl's name). The Ravens were Su Li, Terry Boot, and Padma Patil (gladly there was a ready made way to tell that pair of twins apart).

Runes was, as Harry expected, suitable boring in its first year. They would indeed be memorizing different sets of runes (until, Professor Babbling said, they knew them by heart; which did a fat lot of good for Harry and his perfect recall, though he knew enough to keep his big mouth shut). They would be working primarily with Norse runes.

Harry would be glad for the rest for his poor abused brain cells that this class would give him.

The other classes that he had before the weekend, Charms, History, Herbology, and Transfiguration were all fairly normal. Harry had already read the what needed to be read, practiced most of the spellwork, and only really had to take notes (which he only did half the time anyway).

On Saturday, Harry slumped down into a seat in the Great Hall with only one thought.

Wood had gone (even more) insane.

He had dragged the sleeping members of the team (and Harry) down to the pitch at an inhumane hour, and started to give a rousing speech to the comatose players. Harry played Cat's Cradle. Wood then continued to go over plays and strategies with the those who were still asleep and those who were only mostly asleep. Harry would really have to thank Remus for the yo-yo.

He then forced everyone into the air, and worked them until noon. Harry had dive bombed him every fifteen minutes like clockwork. Ollie was really being a git about this. The others really needed their sleep, and Harry would rather be reading.

Two weeks later, Hermione cornered Harry in the common room. She looked angry as hell. She babbled on for five minutes about how she had yet to see Harry do any homework, and asked how he was completing his assignments.

Harry set his bag down, pulled out some parchment and an inkpot, and set them down on a table, the inkpot on the parchment.

Hermione was still babbling. He knew she was just worried, so this would probably calm her down. And irritate her.

He shushed her, closed his eyes, and muttered an incantation that took about ten seconds. At the end he tapped his wand to the parchment. One of their assignments, Snape's ten inches on the potion he had had them brew on Thursday, wrote itself out on the parchment.

Hermione was speechless. Harry looked like the cat that ate the canary.

Then she of course made him explain.

It was rather simple. He used the fact that he simply had more time in his mindscape to research and put together his assignments, and then using a rather esoteric and little known scribing spell that took what was going to be written from the user's mind in its entirety.

Harry was fairly certain that a deranged N.E.W.T.s student who had a mind similar to his own made or modified the spell. Hermione refused to talk to him for a week. She never had really forgiven him for her inability to do more than the most basic Occlumency.

It wasn't his fault!

A/N2: Not sure if I've ever mentioned it, but this is my first stab at any form of creative writing outside of what is needed for education. So anyone with major complaints about plot, cliches, and such things can go take a long walk off a short pier.

This year's schedule.

Mon

9 Double Charms w/Ravenclaw

10 ~~~~~~

11 Arithmancy

12 Free

1 Lunch

2 Double History w/Ravenclaw

3 -----

4 Double Defense w/Slytherin

5 -----

Tue

9 Double Creatures w/Slytherin

10 -----

11 Double Potions w/Slytherin

12 -----

1 Lunch

2 Double Transfiguration w/Hufflepuff

3 -----

4 Ancient Runes

5 Free

10~11 Astronomy

Wed

9 Double Defense w/Slytherin

10 -----

11 Double Creatures w/Slytherin

12 -----

1 Lunch

2 Double Herbology w/Hufflepuff

3 -----

4 Ancient Runes

5 Free

Thur

9 Double Potions w/Slytherin

10 -----

11 Arithmancy

12 Free

1 Lunch

2 Double Charms w/Ravenclaw

3 -----

4 Double History w/Ravenclaw

5 -----

Fri

9 Double Herbology w/Hufflepuff

10 -----

11 Double Transfiguration w/Hufflepuff

12 -----

1 Lunch

2 Double Ancient Runes

3 ~~~~~~

4 Free

5 Free

Yes, he knew very well what he was getting into. Everything is still four class hours a week.

A/N: To all the reviewers, thank you.

This breaks the recent 4k+ length streak. Chapter title was a pain.

Chapter 29: Lightning Struck Victory

Defense with Sirius Black. It wasn't the horror he had thought it would be. But then again, he had had a few nightmares about it. Partially because he knew the position had been cursed, and after working with Alistair on who had held the post, and what had caused them to leave, Harry crunched the numbers and it came out to a roughly ten percent fatality rate.

He was worried about Padfoot.

Instead he stated that they would be working on dark creatures this year. He gave them a list of what they would be covering and when, and then gave them some reading to do for the first half of the double period.

The second half of the period devolved into a free for all paint duel. Harry should have known. As it was, he barely managed to drop to the ground and avoid getting a face full of paint.

Care of Magical Creatures was interesting. Harry was glad that they weren't presented with creatures that could kill them easily. Though when he had tea with Hagrid during the weekend before class, the large man was more than a little upset that some of his more favorite beasties would only be shared with the fifth and sixth years.

Time passed in the castle as it usually did, with some of the fifth and seventh years beginning to show the signs of breakdowns due to the massive workloads the teachers were pushing on them for the upcoming exams.

The only really odd things was the condition that Harry would enter the common room when he would show up shortly before curfew. One time he was limping and all he would say was, "Goddamn Master Shu, and his goddamn training dummy." Another time, his clothing was smoldering, some of the edges still glowing from whatever had happened to him. He was also missing an eyebrow. When Neville asked him what had happened, he only got two words. "Fire spells."

No one was brave enough to ask just what the hell Harry was up to. Those that even considered what he was putting himself through feared for their psyches.

Harry stared out of a Tower window onto the rain swept grounds. It had been storming on and off for the past week, and Ollie, the ever raving psychotic that he was, had had them out in it practicing just in case the next game, today's game, against Hufflepuff, would take place in a storm.

It was official, October was the worst month of the year. Not only because of this, but because at the first Hogsmeade weekend at the beginning of the month, McGonagall had told him and Nev that they couldn't go. It was too dangerous with the mad woman on the loose.

Even if he had been right, Harry wondered how badly it would hurt House moral for the team to mutiny.

Of course it was only three in the morning. For some reason, he had a bad feeling about the match today. He drew his wand and started flicking it up.

"I have a bad feeling about this."

He'd eaten breakfast and was trying to kill some of his nervous energy. He had more than he usually did, and the uneasy feeling he had been having had upgraded to a sense of dread. Maybe if he focused on something...

He pulled out a self-inking quill, a piece of parchment, and his book of endless notes. He a quick pair of spells, the first on the quill, which he then balanced on the parchment. The second he cast with the tip of his wand on his throat. He flipped his notes open to his list of spells and how they were pronounced.

The spell he had used would transcribe anything he said, vocally or sub-vocally, as one would see it written as it would be pronounced.

It was something to do, if a bit tedious. Sub-vocal casting was the intermediate step to silent casting, though when he had asked a number of higher years for tips, they had just stared at him blankly.

Apparently they skipped straight to silent casting at the start of N.E.W.T.s, which Harry doubted was going to do anyone much good.

Wood was giving one of his insane little speeches. The heavens knew he was a magnificent Keeper, but Harry had known that he was a few tacos short of a combo platter. So while the mad man was raving, Harry started casting water repelling charms at his teammates. It wasn't against the rules, but then again neither was Mage Sight, which he would start using if the game made it past the three hour mark.

The captain had dragged them all down here an hour and a half early, so, barely even listening to Ollie rave, Harry examined his broom. Off the pitch, and out of the role of captain, Ollie was a perfectly likable fellow. On the pitch... you get a manic frothing at the mouth.

Harry idly wondered if Wood had multiple personalities.

He idly added warming charms to the teams' robes. This was probably going to be a long game.

At the two and a half hour mark, Wood called for a time out. Harry had felt the charms give out on his robes an hour ago, and had not had time to reapply them. As Ollie asked, "Okay, we need a new plan, if this goes on much longer the sun is going to start going down, and then the game is likely to take all night, anyone got any ideas?"

As the team started kicking around plans, Harry let loose a slew of the same spells he used in the locker room, adding in drying charms after the water repelling. After about three minutes he slipped his wand back in its holster, and applied a quick sticking charm to his glasses before attaching them to the inside of his robes.

Wood, finally catching Harry's attention, "Harry what was with the spells?"

"Passive charm work, so long as it is not defensive in nature, is not forbidden."

"And the fact that you took your glasses off?"

"Neither is Mage Sight, but I think of it as a little unfair."

The entire time blinked at the black and red haired boy.

"Hey, the game wouldn't have lasted ten minutes if I used it. It just would be fair."

Five minutes later, Harry was racing around the pitch at breakneck speed, eyes darting back and forth. He'd given up on all play except for looking for the Snitch. And he started to feel a chill...

Except the warming charm was still holding strong. He half heard a crack of ice and felt it building on his shields.

"Bloody hell!"

A flash of lightning lit the skies, and he saw the Dementors with his Sight. He felt like being ill. And that brought the weight of how the felt through his Sense crushing down.

The ice on his shields thickened in an instant.

He'd had a theory that he hoped would work, and it put it into play. Runes sprang to life on the outer most concourse of stone that was his wall, and upon all the containers that he had put his worst memories in. Runes for light, heat, and fire glowed, and the weight of the ice eased, but didn't go away.

He'd bought some time, he hoped it would be enough.

He caught a glance of something that glowed with speed and elusiveness and his Sense felt like it was imbued with the feeling of the chase. Harry tore off after the Snitch. He caught bright silver things being shot out by a few of the teachers, felt the warm of the magic of the Patronus, maybe he'd go to Sirius for help with learning it. He'd read a lot on that particular charm, but he had yet to try his hand at it.

He snagged the Snitch, and seeing a Dementor move towards him, he pivoted and shot straight up into the air. He was vaguely aware of his surroundings as something shot down out of the sky, he knew pain, and then blackness claimed him.

The very first thing Harry said as he came back to consciousness in the hospital wing was, "Someone tell me I was not struck by bloody lightning."

You could have heard a cricket chirp in the silence that followed. The Quidditch team, Neville, Hermione, Luna, and the Marauders were all there.

"Goddamn it. I assume it fried my broom?"

Again rousing silence.

"I'm going back to sleep."

On Monday the rain had finally stopped and he was back among the student population. Padfoot had told him not to worry about getting another broom, that he would take care of it for Christmas. He gave his word as a Marauder. That was the one time you could well and truly trust the old dog. Harry had stopped being concerned about having a broom for the next time Gryffindor played, but he still mourned the loss of his broom.

He felt it was strange that he would mourn the passing of an inanimate object. Though he would probably be right angry if something happened to his wand.

And Halloween was coming on Sunday. God he was really starting to hate October.

And he had a new name to add to his list of things to call himself. The-Boy-Who-Was-Struck-By-Lightning. He hated Fate, really he did.

By the time the weekend came again, the grounds of the castle had dried up. And when Halloween came around, Harry spent most of the day walking around the grounds, wrapped in a cloak and warming spells.

He'd packed more than enough food to last him well until curfew into his backpack, and was just sitting down under neath a tree when a black cat approached him and meowed.

'Okay, now that is strange. Cat from nowhere, no tag. Odd. It looks starved... Can't let that continue. Even odder, it has violet eyes...'

"Hello kitty."

"Meow."

Harry pulled a sandwich from his bag and took it apart, feeding the kitty the ham from it.

"You poor thing..."

The cat crawled into his lap, and he said, "Well seeing how thin you are, and how you don't have a collar, I have to assume you don't belong to anyone."

"Meow."

"Well, technically, since all I have are familiars, I can still have a pet... So what do you say? It might be nice to have an animal friend that doesn't talk back... or isn't of varying degrees of insanity. But then again, I can't promise I am all that sane either."

"Meow."

"I'll take that as a yes. So you need a name and a collar... How about Neko?"

He reached into his bag and pulled the strip of leather he used when he had his hair long, and started transfiguring it.

"Meow?"

"I know, it means cat, but hey, it is gender neutral and descriptive."

"Meow."

"Well, I'll take that as a 'if you can't think of anything better you silly human', and there answer is I really can't."

"Meow."

"Alright then!" He tied the collar he had just made around the cat's neck, who started purring. "Well you don't seem to be objecting too much, so... what else to talk about... Ah, how about the animal friends that actually do talk back?"

And now everyone was fairly certain Harry could not get any stranger. He had picked up a black cat from nowhere, and seemed to carry on conversations with it. Conversations that the cat apparently took part in. But no one, no one, dared say the words.

That would only invite an earth shattering revelation along lines of thought that no one with sanity even wanted to contemplate.

Sirius had finally gotten a Potions Master to determine who the potions had been attuned to. But he still needed more evidence. If he was going to do what had to be done, it would need to be overwhelmingly clear. So that meant he had to read the House journals of those who had been using the potions. He hated hard work.

A/N2: The scene with Neko was really hard. It just did not want to be written. Most of the time this stuff just seems to write itself though. It is when it doesn't that I have issues.

I've noticed something weird. I've started eating Naruto fanfics, and my ramen intake has gone through the roof. I wonder if the two are connected...

This Year's Quidditch Schedule

Gryffindor vs. Hufflepuffs

Slytherin vs. Ravenclaws

Ravenclaw vs Hufflepuff

Hufflepuff vs. Slytherin

Gryffindor vs. Ravenclaw

Gryffindor vs. Slytherin

Got an idea bouncing around for a post OotP fic. Insane(quasi-sociopathic)!Godlike(and I really mean it)!Harry. Almost everyone has been against him since the beginning (some may or may not have been turned against him later).

A/N: I start classes again on Tuesday, so updates are sadly going to stop being a daily occurrence. I'll try and update at least once or twice a week, on Saturdays and/or Sundays, but that is shaky as is.

Once more, the reviewers have my everlasting thanks.

Those Naruto fanfics are really screwing with my head. First word out of the box for this chapter wanted to be the name of the titular character. God help me. And added a flavor of paperwork fear!

And a lot of times Hufflepuff wants to come out as Hugglepuff, and not for the sheer reason that the F and G keys are next to each other.

Chapter 30: Harry Rants to Himself

Harry crawled out of bed, idly scratching himself. It was Monday. He had always disliked Mondays, but that had faded with the unholy hatred he now held for Octobers. He'd go back to being surly at that day of the week as soon as he figured out how to do away with his most hated month of the year.

Neko was sleeping on a fluffy cushion underneath the fourposter. Given that it was an ungodly hour in the morning, Harry got ready to face the day. At least there was never a need to fight over bathroom space at this hour. Glancing at his clock, he made a mental note of how long he was asleep. He was to only need two hours of sleep.

Washed and in a fresh set of clothing, Harry idly thought about the fact that he would never have to shave. And prompted by the fact, he pulled a linking book on anatomy out and started reading. He'd been able to wrest some control of his musculature, but he wanted to make sure he didn't screw anything up. He was not going to drag himself into the hospital wing and try to explain it to Pomfrey.

He had had a hard enough time when a bludgeoning spell he had been practicing with had backfired.

That and the fact that the reason why Tonks could walk through a room without tripping over something was the crap she did to her center of gravity, changing all willy-nilly. Why she continued to do it,

he had no idea... If she kept it up for too long, she may very well lose track of where her original center was, and then she would be in trouble.

God, this book was almost as bad as some of the ones he had ready on crystalline structures. At least it was better than some of the more wordy physics texts he had read.

Most of those in years above him were mildly peeved that he made it all look so easy... The fact of the matter was that the amount of time he put into reading, rereading, contemplating, considering, and reading again, would make even the most insane of Ravenclaws blanch. Yes, he had more time when he did this in his mind. Yes, he had a photographic memory to work. Yes, there were very few things about magic that actually gave him issues (he grumpily thought about the Patronus he had been working on on his own, he'd go to Sirius for some help as soon as the Winter Holidays started if he didn't make any breakthroughs by then). Part of what made the rest of them look like fools was indeed the fact that he had already gone over it.

But he'd be damned if they said he wasn't working hard at his school work. Yes, he had his homework done before everyone else, and yes, it only seemed like maybe five minutes for each assignment. He worked for hours on end in his mindscape lovingly crafting each and every single paper. Yes, he got all of the spells as soon as they were assigned in class, and yes, he often did them sub-vocally. He spent all the time he had before curfew working himself into various states of magical exhaustion. Yes, he made the entire class look like children when Sirius had the Defense classes square off with paint spells. He'd been doing it for over a year, and he had had martial arts pounded into him by a raving psychotic.

In fact he was still getting it pounded into him. If the training dummy had actually been sentient, Harry would have called it a sadist.

And then there was the fact that he was studying things that would make his housemates scratch their heads in monkey-like confusion.

Then there was the fact that he was the one that the first and second years came to when they needed help, and he did it with a smile, words any ape could understand, and by speaking to each and everyone of them by name.

Even before he had started needing rather inhuman amounts of sleep, he had been one of the last to bed, and one of the first to face the day. He had actually started upgrading his walks to brisk jogs, and some had started looking at him like he was a freak. He had come to the conclusion that magic had made people lazy. He was not going to let himself fall into that trap. Period.

He briefly considered filling every bed, save those belonging to Nev, Fred, and George, with corn snakes. He grimaced and remembered that everyone knew he could talk to snakes. He would be found out instantly. Instead, he had a rather amusing idea.

He had grabbed breakfast in the kitchens. He didn't want to be the first to breakfast... And now he was sitting on an cushioning charm anchored at a comfortable sitting height, watching the Great Hall from under his invisibility cloak.

As the Lions started hauling themselves into Hall, many trying not to look anyone in the face, Harry was glad he placed the silencing charm around himself. Everyone from the third year up seemed to have decided tie-dye was the best thing. Ever. Not a single member of the house had the standard school robes, and not a single set of robes looked alike.

Strangely some of the first and second years were disappointed that they didn't have robes like everyone else. They must have felt left out. Harry would probably never understand how people behave in groups save for a pair of axioms.

A mob is only as smart as its village idiot.

A group only moves as fast as its slowest member.

Which would probably explain a good portion of why he hated large groups of people. Evil is really rather rather.

Stupid grows on the goddamn trees in most of the world.

It was nearing the end of the day. Harry, in tie-dyed robes himself (it wouldn't do to be caught because a prank that effected the rest of Tower didn't effect him), was idly weaving about the defense classroom. He'd practiced the paint spell to the point that it was

completely non-verbal casting, and he was even managing to point cast it ten percent of the time.

Anyone that actually managed to hit him ended up looking even more colorful (that was the Gryffindors, with the majority of the Snakes, he aided for the face. They'd stopped targeting him sometime in mid-November. God some of them had been really thick).

Charms had been the usual decent class. He always managed to gain a few insights from Flitwick. Arithmancy had been even more boring than usual, since he had forgotten his linking book for the class in his dorm, and he had finished what he had been mulling over for the class. Remus had been particularly amusing with the ongoing tales of some Roman Battle Mages. The legions were bad ass, and their spellcasters even more so.

Remus had said something about training manuals they had had, that there were a lot of incomplete versions floating around. Harry had made a mental note to go look in the master library ledger.

Now that he had gotten the rest of the class off his back, Harry started trading shots with his godfather, a feral grin plastered on his face.

The day before Holidays, Hermione cornered him. Again. She looked exhausted. That fact combined with the few disappearing acts she had pulled, and the obviousness of her temporally impossible schedule, and he could only help but think, 'who the hell would give one to a thirteen year old'.

But then he started twitching, as she practically browbeat him about his apparent slacking off. Again.

Nervous breakdown or no nervous breakdown, he was going to set at least on person in this tower right about his work ethic, and my, my, Hermione had just volunteered.

Harry took a deep breath, and pointing to a chair, yelled, "Hermione, shut up, sit down, and listen!"

The other third year meeped, and put her self in the aforementioned chair. Harry pulled his wand and threw up his now standard bevy of a dozen privacy charms.

"Hermione, what are the two things that I am always seen doing in the common room?"

"Reading and staring into space..."

"Reading textbooks, beginning of fifth year textbooks, among other more difficult things; and using my Occlumency to go over what I have already read. And you do remember how that when inside a your own shields, time generally moves slower?"

She nodded.

"So do you think that it is quite possible that I am actually thinking very hard when I am 'staring into space'?"

Again, a nod.

"Now as for why you are taking your mental breakdown out on me, I am not the moron who gave a thirteen year old a time-turner. Who in their right mind would give an obsessive compulsive like you a dangerous magical artifact like that just so that she can take all the electives? It is insanity! I swear you should just drop Muggle Studies. The reason you gave for wanting to take it is a fallacy. You know damn well how purebloods view the Muggle world. Now if you dare question my work ethic again, I'll get Alistair to resort me at the soonest possible juncture!"

Dropping the privacy charms, he stalked off for the boys' dorms. At the door, he stopped and turned, "And just so you all know how I ended that little rant, the next person to question how hard I may or may not work, well, let's see how well the Gryffindor Quidditch team does when it's seeker is resorted into Hufflepuff! Understand?"

Harry walked away from the room in the deserted section of the north wing that he used to practice his spellcasting, dusting frost from his robes. Almost everyone in Gryffindor had plans for this Christmas, and as grateful as he was to his guardians, he just enjoyed being around Padfoot and Moony more. And since they

were both trying to get caught up on paperwork and grading papers, Harry had decided he would stay at the castle again for Christmas.

He was limping his way toward Sirius's office (damn Master Shu, and damn his training dummy), glad that the Marauder had finally agreed to giving him lessons after Harry had threatened to make his underwear sing 'The Song That Never Ends'. Harry only used earworm pranks when he was irritated, and always as a viscous opening shot in volleys that put even the worst the Marauders did when they were working together.

Neither of the pranksters wanted to know where he had gotten the two hundred gallons of treacle. They had long stopped asking about his propensity for using the substance. And what the hell was with the rhino that one time, they did not even want to think about.

Harry pulled a treacle tart from his pocket and started eating it as he knocked at Padfoot's door. The door opened.

Sirius looked tired. And bored. More so than usual. It probably was a good thing. It meant he would quit rather than have the curse drive him out. Unless the curse was using the paperwork... And that was a disturbing thought. Yes, paperwork was one of the more vile things in existence, but it was only supposed to be the weapon of the bureaucrat. If others learned to wield it...

The end was nigh.

"Pup, I have no idea what you are so upset about. You are making a rather respectable Patronus. Yes, its a cloud of silver mist, but for a third year after a few months of self study? Bloody hell Prongslet, you are not supposed to be perfect."

Harry grunted, and idly wondered what he was doing wrong. He'd used any number of memories (save from those before Halloween 1981) and all he could get was... this. And he didn't want to use the memories he was avoiding. They hurt too damn much.

So Harry shot his godfather a dirty look and made his way back to the mostly empty tower.

Christmas followed shortly after. People got him books. Books he already had access to. He appreciated the thought. The one

exception was the gift Sirius had gotten him. His new broom, which he insisted on delivering face to face.

As Harry ripped the wrappings off the oddly shaped package (why did no one ever put brooms in boxes? Seriously, it would make things so much easier), and he gasped.

"Bloody hell Sirius. When I saw the brand in the window of Quality Quidditch Supplies and it said 'price on request'... that sort of thing means damn expensive."

"Yeah, pup, but I owe you for Christmases and birthdays starting from Christmas of '81 to your birthday in '91. This is to make up for a decade of missed spoiling from having a rich ass godfather."

Harry chuckled as he beheld the Firebolt before him.

A/N2: It has been a while since I've gone into Harry's thought processes... but here we go.

I will say nothing to the accusations of obvious that have been flying around. And as for continuing obviousness... well hush. I can be as obvious as I wish to.

I know, the Christmas "scene" is right horrid. By brain stopped wanting to write for a couple hours and that was all I could force out. Need to start a new chapter and pick up plot threads that are wanting to be woven.

A/N: My thanks as always go out to those that take the time to review my story. 1000+ Alerts!

Sorry for the wait, first two weeks of classes were really... troublesome. Not to mention my muse was going ADHD on Naruto. She needs her cookies...

Sorry if it is a bit short compared to recent chapters, but hey, better than nothing.

Time skips like stones on a pond here.

Chapter 31: Obsessions

As people slowly filtered back into the common room after the end of the holidays, most saw something they had never expected, Harry was neither reading nor meditating. In fact, he was lying down on a couch, holding a what the muggleborn would recognize as a Rubik's Cube. The purebloods were just confused at what he was doing.

Also give the fact that there was a small mound of scrambled cubes and three or four solved ones, they figured this for just more insanity of his. After all, everyone knew Potter to be insane.

And so, over the next month, they watched as it became apparent that Harry had cut back, drastically, on the amount of work he had been working on, in favor of playing with his strange colored cubes.

When Hermione sat down next to him in the common room one night, when he was idly working on a cube that had dimensions of four blocks a side, she said, "What happened to the hard work?"

"I was being a hypocrite. I pointed out that all you were doing was work, and seriously," he paused to put up privacy spells, "you need to give the time turner back. You're turning enough to go to class and get your work done, but not enough to be able to back that extra time up. You need more time to eat, sleep, and relax with the more work you do, and there are no time turners that exist that are strong enough to go more than," he paused for a minute as a look of deeper concentration crossed his face and he bobbed his head from side to side, "Eight hours, and those tend to be made with dark

methods. But I digress, I've been taking January easy, and I'll go back to something roughly resembling my prior pace, but I'll still take time to work on various puzzles."

"That is something else I've been meaning to ask," she said as she scrunched up her nose, "Where'd you get them all? You stayed at the castle over the Holidays..."

"Oh, the rules state that student's staying on campus during holidays can leave if they have supervision. I threatened both Remus and Sirius with thirteen separate pranks involving my favorite of all food stuffs. They took me to London on three separate occasions."

"Ah. I'm not even going to ask what it is with you and treacle. I am however going to say it is a bit unusual, and leave it at that." She stared off as they was a bang and a pair of indignant shouts.

Harry, quickly dropping his privacy spells, raised his voice without ever looking in the direction of the incident, "And that, Fred and George, will teach you to stay out of my things. Just because you failed to get in my trunk does not mean I was willing to let it slide."

One of the twins was now wearing a large chicken suit, with a large cardboard sign with the letters KFC. The other was dressed in a immaculate white suit, a white goatee, and white hair. That chicken place Remus had taken him to had been really good.

"There was one last thing I wanted to talk to you about, Harry. I saw a bunch of Hufflepuffs cornering you a few times over the past few weeks..."

"And they were trying to figure out the validity of the threat that I leveled at my house before the Holidays. And yes, I was serious. And yes, I could get myself resorted into Hufflepuff. And I told them that. I told them if anyone in my own house questioned my work ethic again, I would no longer owe Gryffindor my loyalty. Because respect and loyalty are earned, not given. Remember that Hermione. You still have a few... issues regarding authority figures."

She blushed and got up, no longer looking at him. She then strode off toward the girls' dorms. Harry shrugged and continued working on his puzzle. They were actually very relax, while also being decent practice at moving concentration.

Standing outside of the Transfiguration classroom a few weeks later, waiting for the class to start, Harry was staring intently at a rubber ball in his hand. A few people were wondering just why the hell he was having a staring contest with an inanimate object.

Then the ball floated upward a few inches, and remained there. Harry slowly grew more red in the face, and then he blinked. The ball fell back into his hand and he pocketed it, panting heavily.

He pulled out a Rubik's cube and started playing with it, his eyes flicking at all the people staring at that display of wandless magic.

"What are you all gawking at? I worked very hard to learn to do that, besides, it is only the beginning..."

The maniacal laughter emotionally scarred all those present.

A week after the first Quidditch game of the new year (The 'Puffs kicked Snake butt, much to Harry's pleasure (and the bribes they were starting to levy to get Harry to switch Houses were starting to get a little scary, it's not often fourteen year-olds offer up their firstborn)), and Harry was idly sort through the past few weeks of information. He was starting to run out of new and interesting things in the most of the fifth year curriculum, though a few subjects were starting to catch his eye.

Certain possibilities screamed for further development.

Aside from that, his mental defenses were starting to become a little unnerving. Even for him. And last week he had metamorphed himself into what he generally believed Ronald's and Malfoy's lovechild would look like and had pictures taken to taunt the pair with. So that is saying something. What, no sane person knows, but it is something at the very least.

But onto unnerving defenses, the mazes were starting to become more fluid... The already alien geometries of them twisting into further, and Alistair finally introducing the use of traps to maim and kill. And mentioning traps, the ones currently in place would move in seemingly random ways, never remaining in one place too long. And the beasts, he had finally set a few beasts loose in the defenses,

and they had multiplied like goddamn rabbits. And that vorpal bunny he had created had gotten loose and that was not going to end well.

And thinking of that the 'schematics' for its creation popped on to the desk for his perusal. Which was actually something rather new, and extremely disturbing. A few weeks ago, his interior recall had suddenly gone from 'ahh that's where I put it' to 'when the hell did it get in my hand'.

Eying the plans with distaste (he knew that bunny was either going to save his life at one point, or bite him in the ass (or possibly both)), he closed his eyes and descended further, into his magical core.

It had taken this long to map his core, and be able to tell all of the different components of it apart at a glance. But then again, it was (at least in his eyes) a maelstrom the size of the freaking castle. He idly flicked his eyes about, seeing the seven vortices of energy that spun clockwise (three gold, three green, one white), the three counter-clockwise vortices (one each gold, green, and red), and the three crystalline pillars (all distinctly pale blue).

Just what the hell was he supposed to do with this chaotic mess?

Harry laughed his head off as he remembered the Gryffindor/Ravenclaw Quidditch game. He had caught the Snitch inside of five minutes, and he that was ignoring his Sight and (hopefully) his Sense. Seriously though, the Ravenclaw Seeker, Cho something-or-other, pretty face, sore loser.

He'd commit acts that would be considered sins against nature, humanity, and god, on his own person before he would ever think of spending time with the girl. He was ever grateful that he had decided not to go to that particular peer group.

But then again, the Lions were starting to irritate him again. They never said anything to his face, but some of the looks and whispers were starting to get his paranoia up. And this coming from the guy who has placed wards around his bed to ensure the Twins remain out of his things.

Oh, and thinking of that, and Quidditch, he needed to prepare a little... something, for victory celebration of next month's game... But what to do... What to do...

The grin that lit his face gave most of the older students panic attacks. The first and second years were wondering what would make their favorite tutor so insanely happy. A few people could help but hum a few bars of 'I'm Henry the Eighth, I Am'. Others wept. It was nearing the end of another winter term.

A clear, sunny day, and Harry was sitting under a tree, idly twirling his wand, humming a little tune. Slytherin had gotten a rather epic two hour beat down the day before; Wood denying the opposing Chasers every single attempt; the Twins playing an insane game of tennis with the Bludgers, causing all of the Slytherins to scatter every few minutes; Katie, Angelina, and Alicia working together flawlessly, making a complete fool of the enemy Keeper; and all aided and abetted by Harry, Chasers scattered whenever they managed to rally, Beaters charged during attempts to aim, and the Keeper unsighted during goal attempts.

There had been more than a few scouts there with their eyes on the sixth and seventh years, of which there was only one on the Gryffindor side, Ollie. And a number of them had been quite taken with the Gryffindor team, and had put forth offers for various teams' summer training camps for those that were sixteen or older. Sadly leaving Katie and Harry out of it

Thank god he would not have to play with Ollie as a captain anymore. Thank the heavens for small favors. And for upcoming pranks against the Snakes...

A grin split Harry's face down the middle. Oh it was going to be fun when it kicked off... He pulled out the blue Animagus journal and started reading the section that described how to find your form...

The next morning at breakfast, a song started playing, coming from no place in particular.

"Day-o, Day-ay-ay-o

Daylight come and me wan' go home

Day, me say day, me say day, me say day

Me say day, me say day-ay-ay-o

Daylight come and me wan' go home..."

And then the entire Slytherin house table started reenacting parts of a scene from the movie Beetlejuice. The entire hall watched on in sheer confusion as when the song ended, the Snakes started a conga line out into the grounds.

Harry, however, barely managed to keep a straight face. 'Must not laugh, for laughter shall land me into detention until two years after I take my NEWTs.'

A/N2: Tried to pad it out as much as I could, but I didn't find much to keep my interest.

Song Credit: "Day-O (The Banana Boat Song)" as done by Harry Belafonte.

For those of you who do not get the movie reference, Google 'Day-O Beetlejuice'. Amusement abound.

A/N: For those of you clamoring for another chapter, here you go. One more, and as always, my gratitude goes to those of you kind enough to review.

Anyone who wants to debate the canon plural of Patronus, can go read another story. Patronuses is an ugly word. Patroni is much cleaner.

This is probably it until Friday, at the earliest.

Chapter 32: Fated III :: The Vile Darkness

Harry was idly relaxing, completely and totally alone, on the grounds on a late April late afternoon. Where as the rest of the castle was buckling down for exams, and every day a few more people were checking themselves into the Hospital Wing for panic attacks and stress induced illness, Harry was once more looking for spells that fell under a specific category.

Fire.

One would be quite surprised at the sheer volume of spells that fall under the category of having a component with that particular element. Thank goodness for the pyromaniacs throughout history. This also made Harry wonder, since if fire is good, explosions are better, just how many spells there were that made things go boom. That would be an interesting way to kill time this summer.

He turned a page in the anatomy book (he was running out of new things to learn about the human body... Note to self, bug Padfoot about Black family notes on Metamorphs, maybe there is something new and different there), and was suddenly hit with a series of sensations that threw him into a hyper-alert status.

The temperature dropped suddenly and precipitously, from one exhale being normal, to the next making a visible mist of his breath. The hairs on the back of his neck stood straight up, joined shortly thereafter by the hair on his forearms. And most distinctly, an ice cold pressure started exerting itself on his mental shields, while the late afternoon sunlight advanced to mid evening.

"Oh bugger..."

He whipped off his glasses, dropping them into a pocket, drawing his wand with his next movement. And started silently cursing himself for not being able to produce a proper Patronus. This was going to end very badly if plans 'kill it with fire' and 'uncork pre-Dursley memories' both failed.

He started swearing, he really didn't want his soul to end up as a snack for some filthy creature...

All across the castle, every last occupant could hear a female voice yelling as if raising an alarm... And how alarming the message was...

"DEMENTORS ON THE GROUNDS!"

His eyes flickered about, tracking three separate groups of Dementors, all of them closing in on him. Perfect. Just wonderful. On the one day, every other living being is in the castle, and when he is as far as you can be from an entrance to the castle...

"Fate hates. That has to be it. I can explain it no other way. Fate hates my god forsaken guts. Bah, worry about that later... If only for the fact that I hope to be aware to worry about it..."

He then started running down the list of spells, and what a list it was. And it also gleaned him a few little known facts about fire magics.

First, that unless components are included to direct and sustain the flames, the fire will still have to do business with physics, meaning that the majority of magics for use are confined to short to mid range.

Second, unless otherwise fueled solely by the spell, the fire still requires the oxygen/fuel sides of the fire triangle to continue burning. The primary result of this is that using large scale fire spells in enclosed spaces is best classified as suicide. A secondary result of this is when using fire magics in areas with few combustibles, the fires tend to die out quickly.

Third, there are always exceptions to facts one and two.

He pulled one of the exceptions to both facts out of his spell arsenal. 'Fire darts', maximum range, one hundred and fifty feet, self-sustaining until extinguished, either by water or oxygen deprivation.

He fired off two volleys of six at each of the incoming groups, not stopping to check his handiwork until the last shot was fired.

Turning back to the first group he shot at, he noticed three or four hits, and saw the struck figures had slowed, if only slightly. Given that the general heat of a fire dart was barely enough to light dry wood, it was to be expected. But it was a proof of concept anyways. Fire could hurt them.

The unwounded Dementors sped up, getting closer and closer to their first meal in months, though the only emotion they could feel from it was a grim determination.

Remus and Sirius had been sitting together in the former's office, going over stacks of homework and tests, with Sirius cursing McGonagall for roping him into doing this 'job'. He'd be tendering his resignation after the last final was graded.

He was also glad that he had finally pushed through the other paperwork he had spent the year toiling over. It would still be a few weeks to process all of it, but if things went as expected... Well, it may very well be worth it all of the non-school related tedium he had been through.

When the yell sounded through the castle, they both froze for about a minute, simply staring at each other. And, being the long time friends they were, and both being pseudo-guardians of a rather unfortunate young man, they reacted in the same way.

They both yelled, "Harry!", and bolted out the office door, knowing deep down that 'Fate's butt monkey' (as Harry sometimes referred to himself as) would be in the single most dangerous place.

He took a few deep breaths, knowing that if he was going to be able to do this, he'd have to pull out all the stops... and he only had half a minute before the Dementors entered the maximum range of his long range spells.

He flowed down through his mindscape, right to his core. He then kicked open his connection to his magic as far as he felt comfortable doing. He knew if he opened it too far, his magic would 'burn' hotter and brighter, but it wouldn't last as long as he might need it to.

Besides which, he was fairly certain that if he started throwing his aura off into the visible spectrum, that may just drive the demons into a feeding frenzy.

'There, the first ones just entered my range. Well, here is to landscaping via incendiaries.'

Harry dropped into the position he had come to define as his own dueling stance. His feet were spread a decent distance, his wand hand kept low, the tip of his weapon tracing lazy figure-eights, his other arm moving about to aid in balance, and his upper body held loosely. All of his muscles were relax, but ready to explode into movement.

"Cry havoc, and let slip the dogs of war..."

The demons closed in on their prey, not caring that his eyes had started glowing like emeralds held up to the noonday sun.

And then the unnatural darkness became filled with firelight.

The surviving Marauders ran down the corridors of the school, making a mad dash for the only exit onto the grounds, the Entrance Hall. They had to wade through the occasional group of students making their way to a common room, slightly panicked at the sudden announcement.

"We've gotten far too out of shape, Moony."

"I can't help but agree, Padfoot."

They finally burst through the doors, and started running for the once place they could be certain that Fate's most disfavored child would be. The point farthest from the safety those doors offered.

Panting slightly, Harry finished up the current chain of fire spells, taking a quick tally of his handy work. There were a few Dementors here and there that had visible portions on fire, and he thought that he felt a few that were retreating through his Mage Sense, but this many of the foul things were starting to clog what range he had been able to gain.

He muttered a trio of attempts at the Patronus spell, all of them failing to get more than a strong mist. He grunted at this failure, and mentally shuffled for a few more memories to try for his next attempts.

The black cloaked monsters moved into mid range, and Harry smiled a feral smile, incanting the next series of spells. Hopefully he would start doing actual with the fire magics before the things moved into close range.

Besides which, he had started noting how different spells effected the creatures. Some that should have been devastating on a purely physical level were shrugged off, and others that were meant to be used solely for support purposes sent the things running.

He nodded to himself with a sudden decision. A few facts and observations were falling into place, and there may be one spell that would do the most damage... He'd do two separate volleys at close range, and failing any major effect from those spells, he'd crack open his memories of his mother and father, and then start spamming the one bit of pyromancy he was sure would work.

They kept running, adrenalin and fear keeping them moving when all their bodies wanted to do was slow down. When they finally came around to the far side of the castle, they were faced with a sight that both worried and confused them.

What appeared to be the almost all of the detachment of Dementors assigned to the school were converging on one point. They could see the frost along the ground near the things, and there were so many, they couldn't tell what they were trying to surround.

But to counter act that, they could see some of the creatures fleeing, their black cloaks sporting flames. And with that rather obvious clue, for they had never heard anyone else put forth the theory that the Dementors were possibly vulnerable to fire, their worry kicked up a few notches.

And they stopped, unsure of what to do. If they sent out their own Patroni, they could just very well force the Dementors closer to Harry. Then there was the fact that there were so many of the things that the spell may just fizzle out before it had any effect.

Sirius just grinned, seeing the lights that indicated a volley of literal spellfire, and decided to add his own into the mix, with Remus catching the drift of the 'plan', and putting in a few of his own.

Tiring a bit, Harry let loose one last set of ineffectual attempts at the Patronus. He cursed, taking a few deep breathes. He was actually starting to recognize the emotions each memory represented.

Mild happiness. Fondness. A smidgeon of amusement.

A Patronus needed the deepest depths of positive human emotion. Joy. Love. Hope. Emotions he could only remember, remember in memories that caused him deep pain from the loss he associated with them.

"I'm probably going to need a therapist after this..."

He cracked open every last memory he had that he associated with his mother, pulling every last feeling he had of being loved to the forefront of his mind.

He felt the yard thick layer of ice crushing down on his defenses shatter outwards, the pressure on his mind disappearing in an instant.

The Dementors crossed from mid range to close range.

He smiled sadly as he felt tears in the corners of his eyes.

Harry drew himself up to his full height, and made the disincantive set of wand motions, while practically roaring out the words, "EXPECTO PATRONUM!"

Padfoot and Mooney skidded to a halt as they heard the spelled yelled out, eying each other with curiosity. Their jaws then dropped as a silver shape rammed into the circle of Dementors from the inside, kicking the demons aside as though they were rag-dolls.

Seeing an opening, they both sent out their own Patroni, a wolf and a grim, in an attempt to buy Harry some breathing room.

Huffing out a weak chuckle, Harry let out a last volley of fire spells, gauging the results, and settling in on the course of action to take. The Dementors had slowed with his casting of what they believed was the only thing capable of harming them.

There was only one fire spell that Harry was in awe of. One spell that he considered a master work of spellcraft. Not that it could be considered a single spell by most definitions, being more along the lines of a binary spell that had many, many different primary and secondary components.

The first part was nothing more or less than a set what any muggleborn or raised would call a pilot light. Though there were a half a dozen separate ones of varying intensity. Ranging from barely hot reds, to blindingly bright and searing whites.

The second was a series of spell parts that could describe air-fuel mixtures, containment arrays (which were almost always will enforced), and shutoff commands. This allowed a mage with a good enough memory, fast enough hands, and quick enough tongue, to throw together a wide combination of fire attacks at the drop of a hat.

It had last been used before the Statue of Secrecy went in place, for the sheer reason that its name described its almost sole use.

Warfire.

His feral grin returned as he spoke the three syllables for the hottest pilot light, a violently bright white that seemed to flicker greedily for air. His eyes took on a manic gleam as he uttered the five syllables for the most volatile fuel mixture and the tightest containment he knew, while baring his will down on the shape the fire would take.

As he pushed his magic down his wand, three loose rows of runes flashed into existence upon the magic focus, each row twisting ever so slightly to the right, ending at the tip directly above where the row adjacent started.

When the spell ripped free of the wand, a bright white bar of fire so thick it almost seemed solid slammed into a Dementor, lighting it up like a gasoline soaked rag. It screamed in a voice that could only be described as unholy.

And Harry braced his wrist with his other hand, and started to swing the beam of fire into an arc that would light up more of the demons, as a pair of Patroni started circling him.

Remus and Sirius stared wide eyed as they saw Dementors killed. They were frozen in astonishment for a moment. And so were the Dementors.

Then the things came to their collective senses and fled, turning and scampering as though they seemed to have just one mind.

The Marauders ran to Harry as he dropped to one knee, and his own Patronus returned to him. The lioness nuzzled his face before dissolving into a silvery mist. Harry turned to face the two pranksters.

All Sirius could say was, "Harry, why the hell are your eyes glowing?"

He didn't get an answer because Harry stopped fighting and let himself slip into blissful unconsciousness.

He woke up in the Hospital Wing. He hated the Wing. He looked around, no wand... no pants. Goddamn it.

Ever since he had taken to escaping the Wing as soon as possible, Madam Pomfrey had been coming up with ways to keep him in the Wing. The first involved taking his pants and leaving him with pajamas that no one would be caught dead in.

When he had started transfiguring himself something that he could wear, she had started taking his wand.

He grinned a maniacally.

"Time to work on wandless summoning spells."

Fifteen minutes later:

"You'll never take me alive, Madam Pomfrey!"

It was one A.M. and he was bored out of his mind. Two weeks left til summer holidays, and he had run out of things to keep him busy.

So here he was, pacing back and forth in the Common Room, idly twirling his wand, muttering, "What to do, what to do, what to do..."

His eyes caught on the runes on his wand. He'd been idly studying the runes themselves, but was having issues identifying them... but what about...

He grinned and pulled out his two master ledgers and said, "Wandcraft. AND. Wandlore."

This should take some time.

The morning after the Leaving Feast had finally arrived. Reading the Daily Prophet, Harry just nodded to himself, and passed it to Neville.

Reading the headline story, Neville just shook his head and put his face in his hands. When Hermione opened her mouth to ask a question, Harry just took the paper and handed it to.

She read it and just got a confused look on her face, and said, "So..."

Harry held up a hand for silence and prodded Nev with his other hand, "Do you want to explain all, some, or none of it?"

Neville mumbled through his hands, "Some."

Nodding, Harry began "Do you remember why Nev and I were confined to the castle this year?"

She nodded.

"Did you ever wonder why the hell is this Black after Neville?"

Again she nodded quite eagerly.

"Well, the crime she and three others were convicted of was using Unforgivables against Nev's parents. And that I believe is the minimum amount of understanding needed... at least that is what I think. Nev?"

He nodded.

"So, it would probably be best..."

Hermione broke in with a wan smile, "If I just dropped it? Can do..."

Harry blinked a few times in surprise. 'Well, what do you know...'

And all thoughts were interrupted as Sirius set off a rather loud spell, and in the following silence he yelled, "I cannot take the paperwork anymore. I quit!"

The train ride was, as always, uneventful. They played Exploding Snap, talked with a few of their classmates who dropped by (mainly Lions and 'Puffs (who were still bribing Harry to switch Houses), with a few 'Claws).

Malfoy tried to make a ponce out of himself, and got his robes turned chartreuse for his troubles.

Ronald then did some posturing. Harry turned his hair pink.

Seriously, would those two ever learn...

Walking into the Marauder's Manor with Neko in his arms, Harry made his way up to the bedrooms. Opening the door into a room painted and decorated in various shades of purple, Harry set the cat down on the bed.

"Clothing is where they obviously should be stored and I'm fairly certain you can find your personal bathroom. Dinner is at five."

He went to the door, pulling the morning's paper from his pocket, and putting it on a table near the door.

"Though I would like to eventually know why the hell you decided to follow me around Bella, I will say this, welcome home."

As the door closed, the cat shifted into a woman of medium height, though she looked like someone who was recovering after a long illness. She had a rather cross look on her face, and yelled at the door, "Brat!"

Here Ends Book III

Interlude: Puppet-strings and Dissonance

Everything sharpened into crystal clarity. He saw the events that had driven him into exhaustion that late April, and along side them played events that seemed to have only a parallel of involving Dementors. The evening played through twice, the first showed a loyal little weapon forged with the pain of losing something so recently gained, while the second showcased said weapon showing just how clearly he wore his heart on his sleeve.

Right were anyone could destroy it.

While what he actually did showed the beginnings of an actual warrior.

And once more, a meddling old man watched on, and did nothing when he could have simply pulled a few strings, and made the lives of all those involved brighter. But no, he had a Greater Good to serve, and damn those he thought must be sacrificed.

Harry felt a slight jerk to the left, heard murmuring, and forced himself to try and hear every word.

"... joking right? *Sighs* There are days..."

"... never read the Charter? Why did I ever..."

"... once! Once I would like Murphy to..."

"... life is of no concern to you, you nosy..."

"... last refrain, bring down the barriers..."

"... Why? WHY? I am nothing but damaged..."

Sitting up and pulling out a journal, Harry muses over what the hell he had seen. If it happened again, he would finally start to get some answers... Hopefully.

A/N2: For those of you curious as to just what my school schedule is, I only go in on Tuesdays and Thursdays, but they are very full days. I leave the house at 7:20ish on the days that I have school, with my first class at 9:30 (Parking is HELL at my college, this is the only

way to get anything that is a good half a mile from the nearest building). I then proceed to have three hour and a quarter long classes, with fifteen minutes between each class. My last class is two and a half hours long, ending my day at 4:30. So, yeah, I really need(-ed) to readjust after having been out for the entirety of the summer (not sure if the adjustment is even done yet... Bleh).

Ending Word Count for Book 3, less A/Ns and Interlude: 23,097

Total Word Count, all books, less A/Ns and Interludes: 89,181

Thanks for listening, if you read this, that is. Good day.

A/N: The reviewers, as always, have my thanks. (1000+ Reviews)

Sorry for the delay, first actual essay came up in English, and no matter how easily creative writing comes to me, essays are that much more difficult.

Probably going to end up bumping the rating up to M for language soon. Given the events I have planned for this year, Harry is probably going to end up using a lot of foul language as both a coping mechanism and to point out the gross stupidity of certain members of the wizarding world.

There is never enough wandlore in fanfiction. And there can never be enough wandlore.

Chapter 33: Settling in for the Summer

Being Events in an Alteration of Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

Harry had forgotten one very important thing about planning... That you should actually think ahead when doing it. So, with three or four potions too many going in the workroom he had claimed in Marauders' Manor unusable for anything other than potions (and only then with a bubblehead charm, he made a note to get some ventilation spells in there), he was spread out on the dining room table, with four or five hours to go until dinner.

He was currently working on what he knew of conjuration, and how to make the duration of what was made permanent. For larger objects, those that are roughly larger than a better block, all that can be done is pump more energy into it when it is being made. Then depending on the complexity of the object, the materials it is made out of, and the size, it will last as long as it will last.

Now for the objects on a smaller scale, there are a number of spells, that when properly anchored by the correct spells, will ensure that the object will last as long as the materials it is made of will last. Outright magical materials were out, people having died attempting to conjure some fairly strange things, and calling forth raw materials to work with was a horse of another color, though one Harry was eagerly researching, but that was a contemplation for another time. And that was just what he was doing with a number of identical

brown leather-bound journals and a bunch of glass capsules the size peanuts.

Of course, the permanency spells wouldn't be the only ones he would be adding. He was seriously wondering at why the hell many of his classmates were complaining about their parents wouldn't get them things... when it seemed so very easy for Harry to make his own. Bah. The journals he had so far received as gifts had been adequate for his needs, but why settle when you can make something so very much better. So, combine the charms needed for books to had an endless supply of pages, add in the enchantments needed for the journals to be protected from destruction, anchor a few of the mental dictation spells he had (along with keeping a ready supply of inks; black, red, blue, and green; the glass capsules being charmed with space expansion and replenishing spells), and voila!

Journals that would make anything else look absolutely pedestrian. Of course, it would take a bit of work to get off the ground, but so worth it.

And, done. That makes twenty, he'd probably never have to do this again, ever. As for those who has why the hell he would need twenty endless journals... Well you wouldn't want to put notes for the transfiguration of complex crystalline structures a few dozen pages before the recipe for a flesh desolving potion and directly after your notes on healing spells, now would you? And as for the reason for why a person with perfect memory would need journals? Well no one lives for ever.

'Stop being so damn morbid, Harry...'

And his timing had never been better, dinner smelled like it was almost ready. Awesome. He started cleaning up the mess he had made when a former resident of Azkaban walked into the room... Wait, that wasn't as descriptive as it used to be. There were now two former Azkabanians in the Manor... Well, anyway, the only female resident of the Manor came in, and hit Harry upside the head with what felt like a rolled up newspaper.

"Hey, Bella, why are you abusing that? I figured you might like to frame it... or something. After all, the headline is declaring your innocence for all the world to see. Oh yeah, Sirius and Remus won't be here until later in the week."

"Brat."

"You already called me that, got anything new and different in the way of insults?"

She glared at Harry for a good half a minute before saying, "I've got questions for you..."

"And I for you, share and share alike?"

"But who goes first?"

Harry smirked, and pulled what looked like a galleon from his pocket and started walking it across his knuckles, "You know, among goblins there is no better arbiter of fate than a coin toss. And they see it as a constant joke to us that all the goblin minted currency has identical Gringotts seals on both sides. So I asked my account manager, what a wizard was to do, and he tossed me this coin." He held it up for her to see. One side was the unmarred Gringotts seal, the reverse was almost identical, save for a gouge mark across the face. "He then told me that goblin currency had one face that was beautiful beyond measure, and the reverse was a horror. Fate, for good or ill. So, Bella, call it. Seal or scar?"

He flipped the coin up in air.

"Seal."

He caught the coin out of the air, and slapped it down on the back of his hand, and pulled the obscuring fingers out of the way. He grinned.

She pouted and said, "Brat."

"That is getting really old, really fast Bella."

"Yeah, yeah, ask you question..."

The kitchen elves started popping in with dinner.

"Why'd you seek me out when you escaped, instead of fleeing?"

"Easy. I felt I owed your mother. I wasn't actually a Slytherin in school. I was a 'Claw. That actually the only other accepted house by the majority family, heaven forbid if I had been a Lion or 'Puff, though. That being said, Lily was my best friend in school, and if... what had happened to me didn't occur, I probably would have been you godmother. So, even if I couldn't be there as a normal person, I'd be around to protect you if it was ever needed. How did you know I was innocent?"

"The Lestrangle brothers kept rather detailed records, the problem was sorting through all of it. The fact that they had over a thousand doses of the numerous potions they were giving you was also a dead giveaway. Took Padfoot almost half a year to find an independent Potions Mistress to break them down to see who they were bound to. I think I figured out how you escaped from what I've managed to drag from Sirius about his stay in the island fortress, but how'd you get out?"

"You already know how being in an animal form weakens the mental damage of Dementors. Well, I was probably the only person in Azkaban who came out saner than when they were put in. After I had... dried out from the... crap that they had me on, I resigned myself to my fate, only idly planning an escape. But when I got my hands on a copy of the Daily Prophet where the front page picture was you posing with the corpse of a rather large Basilisk. It lit a fire in my head, and the idle plans solidified. Of course, a cat could easily slip between the bars of the window. The rest was rather easy. How long did it take for you to figure out I wasn't a real cat?"

"Immediately."

She growled out the next word, it sounded quite threatening, "Explain."

"Mag Sight and Sense. I've Seen two animagi in their transformed states, and McGonagall was also a cat. That and the feel of the magic around you were entirely too human. It was hop, skip, and minor deductive leap to figure out who you were. So, what is your plan now?"

"Recover. Why'd you talk to me like you did? You practically told me your life story..."

"Needed someone to talk to. I didn't want to burden my... friends, my familiars are entirely too mouthy, and the fact that any chance of you talking back was far enough into the future to be worth what was at that point, a chance to get a lot of things off my chest..."

"Did it help?"

He smiled sadly and held his thumb and forefinger three inches apart, "A bit. I'm out of questions, you got any more?"

"How big was the snake anyway."

"Hundred feet."

They had been eating as they had been speaking, and had managed to get through half of the meal just fielding questions and returning answers. Harry noted that it was meatloaf and mash. The elves always made good food.

Two days later Harry was once more spat out of the fireplace at the Leaky Cauldron.

He picked himself up off the ground, and dusted himself off, saying, "I hate traveling by the godforsaken Floo."

Grumbling to himself about the inadequacies of wizarding transportation, he made his way to the Alley. He had to make a trip to the apothecary to stock up on potion ingredients, he idly toyed with the idea of getting his clothes shopping for the year out of the way now (but then he promptly threw it in the trash where it belonged, though truth be told he would probably have time to get it out of the way if what he was going to be doing took as long as he feared), he had his trunk in his pocket and he would be seeing about getting some more compartments added to it, and of course, he had to stop by Ollivander's to see about the runes that had appeared on his wand.

So, he made his way to the one that could either take the longest in the worst case, or the shortest in the best case, Ollivander's. The bell on the door rang as Harry stepped into the shop.

"Ahh, Mr. Potter, I wasn't expecting on seeing you for a long time yet, may I ask what brings you into my shop?"

Harry pulled his wand out of its holster and handed it to the wandmaker, "Of course Mr. Ollivander, something... strange happened with my wand. Three rows of runes appeared on it, I did some research, but I wanted to be sure..."

Ollivander took the proffered wand, and examined it in minute detail for several minutes, whispering to himself in what Harry thought sounded vaguely like Ancient Egyptian (which he had idly started studying, but was having issues learning due to a lack of source material), he then straightened going to the front of the shop, locking the door, and flipping the sign from 'Open' to 'Closed', before finally saying, "Yes, yes, it has been a few decades since something of this sort has occurred. Would you like to share your theory with me, Mr. Potter, or would you prefer to hear what has happened from me?"

"I would prefer to learn what has taken place with my wand from the man who has been studying wandcrafting and lore for all of his professional life."

"Quite wise, Mr. Potter, quite wise. Come, join me in the back. I am going to need your input for the start of this process, and I can easily explain while I work," the strange old man said while disappearing into the what was probably his workshop. Harry snorted, shrugged, and then ambled after the wandmaker.

The back of the shop had several workbenches with tools, each workbench seeming devoted to a different material. There was obviously woodworking, but there was also benches for leather, metal, gems, and even cloth. There were numerous cabinets, probably where all of the materials were stored. All Harry could do at the sight of all this was cock one of his eyebrows.

Ollivander points to a stool sitting in the middle of the workshop and says, "Take a seat, Mr. Potter, take a seat, might as well get comfortable. Even with my explanation, I'll need you to stick around for a little while. Now, where to begin..."

Harry sat himself down and got ready to take some mental notes.

"Ah, yes, at the beginning. Beginnings are always a good place to start. Wands, as magical foci, can only handle so much energy before becoming saturated. The level of energy needed varies from

wand to wand, depending up on the materials used, yours having one of the highest capacities I have ever made. This energy bleeds off at a set pace, once more dependent upon the materials. Once more, yours is in the top percent of all the wands I have made. Now, the problem is, what happens if the wand becomes completely saturated with magic and remains that way?"

"Nothing good?"

"In most cases, that would actually be a very good answer. Unless proper fail-safes are included, a wand could literally blow up in its wielder's face. So what the occasion that brought about this change in your wand?"

"Dementors, I found out that they burn rather well. Especially when you use Warfire."

The wandmaker turned toward the young man and blinked. Several times. His mouth was similar to one belonging to a fish out of water. "Well that would probably do it. Hold out your hand please, palm up. You said you were right handed correct?"

Harry did as was asked of him and the old man then went around to the cabinets, pulling out materials. "I was, but I'm more ambidextrous now."

A few contemplative sounds came from the old wandmaker, who then replied, "Both hands then, if you please." He started placing various samples of materials on Harry's upturned palms, with much scrutiny, and said, "Where was I?"

"Fail-safes. By the way, how are you telling whether or not there are reactions? Mage Sight or Sense?"

"Aural viewing. Fail-safes. I build into all of my wands a measure that will allow them to bleed off larger amounts of excess energy. The runes are that system. Now, given that fact that you have only just finished your third year at school, and have yet to hit your full power, the first stage in protecting your wand from destruction via your own magics is not going to handle it. What I am going to do is further increase the amount of energy that is bleed off. This is going to be done in two ways. The first is going to be in how the wand dumps magic into the air and the second in how it feeds the magic

back into you. If the issues continue in years to come, I shall have to increase how it is able to store energy. This is quite marvelous you know. It has been quite sometime since I have had to do this, and I always enjoy it. Now, while I am going through the alterations to your wand I am going to add a few... enchantments to it as well. So, was that along the lines of what you were thinking Mr. Potter?"

"More or less, I know Ollivander wands are some of the best in the world, and what I've read about wandlore and craft, and knew about the generalities of what you were speaking of, but it is always nice to have specifics."

"Yes, specifics are always enjoyable. I think that is everything," he pointed to the pile of materials he had gathered, "I need from you. It should take about five hours to finish the alterations to your wand."

"So, what materials are you going to use?"

The old man simply grinned and said, "I shall tell you after I finish. Now, run along."

"Thank you, Mr. Ollivander. How much is this going to cost?"

"Fifty-eight galleons, six sickles."

Harry gave a short bow to the master wandmaker, and left the shop. He was cursing silently however. He wasn't going to be able to put off clothes shopping. Maybe he would get himself a new pair of dragonhide boots... Wait, he was by himself, without his wand, so shrinking down his bags was impossible. He would have to wait until later to get that shopping out of the way... Now how to kill five hours...

"Ah-ha! Florean Forescue's Ice Cream Parlour!"

A few minor errands (and five hours of ice cream) later, Harry knocked on the door to Ollivander's. The wandmaker answered the door with a smile, flipping the sign back over to 'Open'.

"Right on time, Mr. Potter. Now, just hold out your hands for a moment. Palms up again, if you please."

Harry shook his head and did as was asked. Ollivander drew his wand and tapped the pads of Harry's thumbs and ring fingers, and then there was a bit of pain as his palm was jabbed and a glob of blood was pulled away, hovering near the tip of the wand.

Ollivander dropped the blood onto an object on the counter, and then handed the object to Harry. It was an oval shaped wand holster, seven inches long and two wide.

"That holster Mr. Potter, is far more superior to the others that are sold, both here and else where. Instead of straps, there is a sticking charm along the back. And once stuck, it has a notice-me-not charm that should make it so that none but you know it is there. Along with that, so long as your wand is within it, there are very few ways to damage it. Now, using your thumb and ring finger, either hand, snap your fingers."

Harry gave the odd old man a look, but did as he was told with his right hand... and his wand appeared in his hand. He examined how his wand had been changed. The grip was now wrapped in a strip of white leather, which was marked with silver runes. From the grip to the tip, were now three slightly curved lengths of metal, blood red and lustrous save for flecks of black, the ends of which were in line with the bottom of the neighbor to the right, like the runes. The runes themselves now seemed to be written in gold.

"It's even more beautiful than it was before, sir."

"Thank you, Mr. Potter. Now for the materials I used, the leather is from a Normandy White, the breed of dragon that experts often agree is the most intelligent. The runes on it were inked in what is potion that consists mainly of silver and dragon blood. The runes running along the length of the wand have been inlaid with gold from a dragon's horde to increase the amount of energy they let off. The metal is a combination of an alchemic alloy called black steel and scales from a Chinese Fireball. Now, the wand will only come to your hand like that if it is in the holster, though if it is within ten yards of the holster, and out of your hand for more than two minutes, it will return to the holster."

"That is useful, thank you. But I do have one last question. Is it me or do most, if not all, of the materials in my wand relate to dragons in some way?"

"Indeed Mr. Potter... How curious."

Harry rolled his eyes and paid the strange old man.

Harry was lounging in one of the sitting rooms, working on his Runes notebook. He had commandeered it as he really, really didn't want to spend most of the summer in his study. Yes, the desk was nice, and there was plenty of room to move around, but nobody ever visited him when he was holed up in his room.

Probably because of the number of traps he had been forced to set up when the occasional prank war came about.

'I swear, you dump a couple buckets of oatmeal on people, and they fear for their lives.'

Speaking of fearing for their lives, Sirius popped his head into the room. "There you are pup, I need to talk to you."

Harry glanced down at the rune array he was working on, watching as a last set of annotations added themselves to the page. He canceled the dictation spell, and set the book down. "So, when did you get back and what do you want, Padfoot?"

"Five minutes ago, and to talk."

"About?"

"Combat training."

"It is about the prophecy?"

"Yup."

"So, what is the agenda?"

"Laps around the Pitch and calisthenics in the morning and the evening, training duels every Monday and Friday, and Spell arsenal analysis every Wednesday. And you finally get something that your parents had made when they first heard of the prophecy."

"Oh really?"

"Yup," he said as he tossed a box about two inches per side at Harry ",catch."

He stared at the box, not sure whether or not Sirius had anything planned, so he said warily, "What's in it?"

"A secondary magical focus. A Shield Ring to be specific. Oriculum as a base, twilight diamond as a magical core. Commissioned the day after they heard the prophecy. Finished... October 31, 1981. Best used if you have shield charms down to the point where they are point cast and completely silent. Also alters the spell structure that those shields that don't have will based components, do."

Opening the box, the ring was braided strands of metal, most of them shades of purple and blue, save a few that seemed to shine with a silver light. It resized itself to his left middle finger when he put it on. He got up from the couch he was on, moved away from the furniture, and held his left hand in front of him, fingers spread wide.

A simple circular protego sprung up in front of him. He fiddled with the shape, size, and thickness of the shield for a moment, before willing it to anchor a foot from his palm, and moving it about.

"Seems like it would be dead useful."

He smiled sadly. Even before he was born, his parents had been looking out for him.

A/N2: And here is the latest chapter. Lots of you were asking about that newspaper... I didn't forget about it, I just wanted to put it off until he actually had a conversation with Bella. As always thanks for reading, next chapter will be here when it gets here. Hopefully sooner rather than later.

I recently found out the general statistics about the Naruto fanfic community (.net/u/1261436/grammahPolice) on the site in regards to reviews, and I was wondering if anyone knew anything similar for the Harry Potter community?

A/N: Once more, I would like to give my thanks to every last reviewer. Oh, and 1000+ favorites!

I've read at least half a dozen fanfics where Naruto is the author of LOVELESS. I know exactly where LOVELESS comes from (big fan of FF7), but I really wonder where the hell that idea originated.

That and what the hell is it with harems in that particular community?

Chapter 34: Summer Madness

Part of Harry's new training included what Sirius lovingly called 'Dodge Practice'. It took place in the a training room that resembled the sparing floor of a martial arts dojo. It currently involved a pair of sparring dummies firing a version of the paintball spell, a version designed so that when in flight it visually mimics common spells used in combat... And the fact that the mild stinging hex component had been upgraded.

So, Harry was going through his rather... full catalog of foul language, all while planning how to get back at Padfoot for this.

'Why the hell did I ever agree to this... Sirius is insane!'

Harry growled as a pair of spells hit him, one on his left bicep, the other in his gut. He flung his left hand out, wincing as his upper arm protested the action. An opaque hexagonal shield flared into existence in front of him.

"End spar! Harry, this is called dodge practice, not shield practice." And with saying that, Sirius threw a water balloon at Harry, who promptly hopped out of the way. Of course, when it hit the ground the paint filling it splattered everywhere.

"You are so juvenile Padfoot. I swear, if I didn't want to kick off yet another prank war, I'd get you back for this. But seeing as I actually feel bad for the elves whenever we start going at each other, I won't."

"Well then, young Harry, I must commend on your maturity. Lunch should be ready soon."

Harry grumbled to himself as he left the sparing room. The grumbling turned into cursing when Sirius nailed him in the back with another paint filled water balloon. Thoughts of revenge started floating around in his head.

It was only the second week of June and Sirius was going to pay.

Finally tired of never having enough room in the one workshop/potions lab he was using, Harry poked his head into one of the other ones and saw that no one was using it. Narrowing his eyes he saw that the only one that was in use was the one he had claimed.

"This won't do at all..."

Remus (who was reading Transfiguration Today), Sirius (who was replacing some of Remus's periodicals with gay porn), and Bella (who was idly planning revenge against the Lestranges) were all brought out of their activities when they heard maniacal laughter. It carried on for a good five minutes.

Remus went to lock down his rooms and pack. He could do with some time in the great outdoors.

Bella decided she would get out of the house... she had a friend in France who would probably be glad that she was no longer insane, or a criminal.

Sirius felt a shiver down his spine like someone walking over his grave... and promptly ignored it. He had survived the displeasure of Lily Potter. What the hell could Harry do?

But really, Sirius Black was never noted for his intelligence...

Harry went over the list in his head. Vanishing resistant itching powder, applied in such amounts that there was no longer any save bed, couch, or bedding in the Manor, while also applied to every last single bog roll in the Manor, check. All clothing sized to fit Sirius, transfigured and charmed in countless embarrassment inducing ways (he was really quite proud of the charm that would cause half of his slacks to transform into hot pants whenever more than four people were looking in his general direction), check. Elves properly bribed to keep Sirius from eating anything other brussels sprouts,

liver, and beets, check. Doorways charmed to change Sirius's hair into new and interesting styles and colors, check. Superglue on the toilet seats, check. Dungbombs charmed to invade bubblehead charms in the hallways, check. Sent Dobby to fetch Peeves, double check. Getting the hell out of Dodge, in progress.

He'd packed a bag, grabbed his books, and reserved a room at the Leaky Cauldron. He did not want to be around when Peeves showed up. Even if the little blighter agreed with the deal of Harry supplying him with joke products this year, the bastard probably would never keep up his end of the bargain if Harry was around.

Which was why the first thing on his research list as soon as he settled into his room would be the exorcizing of poltergeists. He tossed the powder into the fire, called out "Leaky Cauldron!", and stepped through the Floo.

Sirius would be waking up from the sleeping potion Harry slipped him in about five minutes. He would then find the sticky note that Harry would tell him exactly when he had trapped in the Manor, and get the elves to actually fix what he had trapped, in exchange for a legally binding surrender.

"Okay, I admit it. I was wrong. Harry can, and is, worse than his mother. I swear the worst she ever did was hit me with a frying pan."

Sirius was currently having a very bad week. His current local was hiding under a counter in the kitchen. The prankster could not believe that Harry had gotten the elves on his side for this. They would not launder the sheets. He hadn't eaten anything decent in the Manor for the length of the siege... the blasted bat-eared blighters had locked down the fridge and pantry.

"But I could take all of that. But no. Harry unloads the Unforgivable of the prank world. He called in Peeves!"

Of course, this ranting had given away his position. Peeves had been listing to Sirius whine for the last five minutes, nodding along. He then threw a water balloon filled with paint at the Marauder.

Sirius decided he would get in contact with his solicitors... He had a document he needed drafted.

A little over a week had passed since Harry had left Sirius more or less alone in the Manor, with the only beings for company being the elves and Peeves. He'd quickly gotten what he needed in the event Peeves needed to be... evicted from the Manor. Once that had been settled, it only took a few hours, which made Harry wonder why the hell Peeves was still at Hogwarts with all of Filch's complaining about the spirit.

He had then sat down, taken a piece of parchment, and made a list. He had a feeling that there was storm fast approaching, and not in the meteorological sense. Voldemort would return, sooner or later, but knowing how Fate absolutely hated him, it would probably be far too soon.

Taking his face out of the Anatomy and Physiology of Magical Creatures text he was reading and finishing off the notes in one of his journals, he eyed the list that was sitting on the desk. It wasn't prioritized... But it was definitely all things that he found important. Advance in Arithmancy and Runes, even if time on other Hogwarts subjects must be sacrificed. As a sub heading to Arithmancy, build a mental catalog of spell formulas, with a focus upon those that could be used to high effect in combat. Learn as many shield spells as possible and perfect the use of them. Finish the Animagus transformation. And... he eyed the book he had just set down.

Taking a deep breath, he flexed his hands, and then watched as the muscles and bones shifted and writhed underneath his skin.

He'd sent the letter he had received from Sirius's solicitors to his own solicitors, and he should see if the surrender was acceptable in a day or two. Maybe not the best use of money, but his father's and mother's journals had contained more than a few comments about wishing they had sicced the solicitor on Padfoot.

He chuckled at the pun, and picked up his Runes linking book.

"Okay Peeves, he's surrendered. You'll get your payment on the Second of September. Just remember, no using it on me or my friends."

"Of course Potty, it has been a pleasure doing business with you. Almost makes me wish the Weasel Twins could afford to pay me off."

The poltergeist made his way through the wall and appeared to leave the house. Harry eyed Sirius where he was huddled in the corner.

"Dobby!"

"Yes, Master Harry Potter sir?"

"The war is over, the elves know what I did and can start defusing everything. The payment will be on the dining room table."

Harry then turned to his shell shocked dogfather and lightly nudged the man with his foot.

"Sirius, snap out of it."

"So... many... cats!"

Shaking his head, Harry pulled an airhorn out of his backpack and set it off, right in Sirius's face.

He didn't know Padfoot could scream like a little girl.

Sirius gave his best friend's soon a dirty look, "You know, calling in Peeves to wag a war by proxy... That is just dirty pool."

"Yeah well, I'd rather not put up with your antics Sirius. I have too much planned for this summer."

"So... does that mean you don't want to go to the Quidditch World Cup?"

Harry just looked at Sirius like he was stupid.

"Dumb question, right. Why should I take you?"

"I could always get Peeves back here..."

"Understood. So what is it you have planned, anyway?"

"Well this and that... I also need some backup for when I start to attempt the Animagus..."

The man's face lit up like Christmas had come early.

Harry left to unload the bags of sweets he got for the elves. Little blighters would do anything for a sugar fix.

July had passed quickly enough, once Sirius had been taught his lesson. Bella and Remus returned a week after Sirius had surrendered, to the pleasant surprise of a still intact Manor. Even more surprising was the fact was the copy of the surrender that had been posted on the door to each of their rooms.

They both helped in their own ways with Harry's studies and training. Remus, with his varied career history in both worlds, served time watching over Harry's physical exercises and also helping increase his combat spell arsenal. Bella, on her good days, talked with Harry about the Death Eater's tactics and operations. For the most part, there were the warm bodies that they threw at problems, those that any half decent Auror would be able to take half a dozen of with ease. But she made sure that he knew the other parts of Voldemort's operations.

Sirius of course continued his torture... err... teaching with his dodge practice, to which he also added the occasional flying object. It was the end of the month before Sirius decided that Harry was proficient enough at getting out of the way of spellfire that he would allow Harry to use a shield spell. The bad news was that he doubled the number of sparing dummies.

He'd sent out another round of correspondence with Hedwig, giving her the ever welcome excuse to stretch her wings. He had added another item to his to-do list. He had almost completely forgotten his work on what little wandless magic he could do, that little being those that fell under remote object manipulation.

He grinned. His use of that category of spells was starting to resemble what mundanes would call telekinesis, but he had recently encountered an issue. The amount of focus needed to do more delicate motions made it limited to one object at time. His eyes flickered over to where a quill was seemingly writing out row after row of runes of its own accord.

He paced for a good half an hour to start, kicking around theories of just how to train his mind to truly multitask. As always when his intellect was focused on an object side projects related to the problem, but offering no solution, were noted and tagged for further research and trials, and then tossed aside.

It took six and a half hours to come down to a pair of possible solutions, one almost purely philosophical in nature and the other was a an exercise in brute power. The latter would be easy, simply go into his mindspace create 'copies' of himself and start having them to do completely unrelated things. Lather, rinse, repeat as many times as necessary. The former... was highly theoretical and most likely impossible. And it was a direct result of how he saw himself in his mind. He had... an avatar for lack of a better word, that interacted with his envision-ment of his mind. Yes, he could remotely manipulate his defenses, but only one part at a time. And that was the problem. He would need to dispose of the notion of himself as existing in only one place at a time. And hence it fell under the heading of a philosophical problem...

Snatching up the quill and looking at the precise arrangement of runes, he nodded, and went to his bed. One solution could be put into work right now and hopefully yield results soon, while the other... It would probably be one big headache.

But there was work to be done.

He dropped to the ground of the training room, gasping in pain. This particular room was configured for fights that would take place indoors. Corridors, rooms, more corridors. Harry wrapped one arm around his chest, letting out a growl.

"That really, really hurt. That particular project is getting shelved. Cause that is a new and interesting brand of pain I have no interest in getting better acquainted with. Dobby!"

Harry was really quite fond of the mad little elf. The fact the he responded so... insanely to the smallest amounts of kindness, was both unsettling and endearing. Harry hauled himself up so that he was sitting Indian style of the floor.

"Yes Master Harry Potter sir?"

"How goes the project I asked of you?"

"Dobby has all of the fileses from the British Isles, and was just about to get started on the French..."

"Wonderful Dobby, can you get me about twenty of the ones you have and put the rest in my study?"

"Right away Master Harry Potter sir!"

The elf poofed away, and came right back a moment later with a stack of rolled up parchments.

"Is there anything else you need?"

"No, thank you very much for doing this for me Dobby."

The little elf squeed like Harry had just made his millennium, and poofed away.

Harry sighed, which induced a painful minute or two of coughing, and he grabbed the top most parchment.

"Name: Hallieth, Jameson D.; Date of Birth: January 3rd, 1671; Maximum Magical Potential: High Sorcerer; Notable Magical Traits: Metamorphmagus; Occupation: Auror; Date of Death: September 16th, 1722; Circumstance of Death: Killed in Action, Combat with Dark Wizards; Combat Notes: Auror in charge noted that Jameson kept fighting when any normal wizard would have been bleeding out on the ground, recommended for posthumous commendation; Cause of Death: Approximately thirty (30) mid-tier piercing spells to the torso, limbs, and head; Postmortem Notes: A number of the piercers seem to have been partly healed prior to death / the subject, though being fifty-one years of age ..."

Finishing the report, he picked up the next, a chill slowly creeping up his spine.

"I don't know whether to thank the Wizarding World for keeping meticulous death records in the public domain, or finish what Fate has started and let what I'll probably learn from these records drive me completely and totally insane."

Harry swore profusely in Gaelic.

"There are days I really hate my life."

He tossed the parchment with the other read file.

"I am likely going to end up emo before I turn seventeen. Either that or I'll die a horrible, horrible death. I think I would prefer the latter. I don't want to have to put poor Nev through beating the emo out of me."

Harry had replaced everything in one of the workrooms with panes of opaque glass. The walls were covered with it and they were suspended from the ceiling, giving barely enough room to walk between them.

He was currently darting between his substitute for chalk boards (he hated chalk, it was dusty and made an absolutely horrid sound when being used), writing out various formulas in a grease pencil. On a few boards rune arrays could be seen, drawn in black with annotations in various colors.

Sirius poked his head into the room. "Pup, you in here?"

"Near the back Padfoot."

The older man weaved his way between the hanging surfaces, back to when where Harry was working on... something. Pieces of parchment were stuck to the board, and each one was surrounded with either comments or chunks of what looked like spell formulas. Harry had a little cart near him, and it had pieces of parchment, ink, grease pencils, and his journals.

"I don't think even your mother went this insane when it came to working on a project."

Harry froze for a moment. He turned to Sirius and scowled. He then went back to his work, not saying anything to the Marauder.

He finally broke the silence. "What was she like?"

"Bella can tell you more about her, but I will say one thing. She was fierce. They say that Dumbledore was the only one that Voldemort

was afraid of. That's only half true. A number of Death Eaters that were captured during the last war made comments that amounted to a very interesting conclusion. He was afraid of what your mother would become. It was known to everyone in our year that she was the top student. She was easily the most talented mage to come out of the school in two decades. She was also one of the most powerful in that span of time. She was easily within the Archmage range of power, putting her on even footing with both Dumbledore and Voldemort, all they had on her were years of experience. So... what are you working on."

"I've had a few ideas about the fire-whip spell running around in my head for the past few days. Need to get it out."

"Define ideas..."

"Altering the structure of the spell such that the excess magic pumped into the spell is not wasted, but instead causes the whip to become even hotter. There's also a secondary idea, and no, I am not telling you about it."

Sirius pouts and whines, only to get kicked in the shin.

"Now why did you come looking for me?"

"Ah, yes... Damn, I've completely forgotten."

"Get out Padfoot, before I start bribing the elves to short sheeting your bed."

A/N2: Lost my thread of concentration at this point, and now I figure I should give you guys an update. Sorry it's not longer.

It could also be the fact that I have this (these) plot bunny(-ies) in my head for Naruto. Don't know which. Ja Ne.

A/N: Again, thanks go out to everyone kind enough to review. And my apologies for the long wait. I got stuck on what to write about, and then Real Life™ made it difficult to get back to this.

Hrm... all previous chapters have at least 10k hits. That is about the only mile stone I can think of.

Again, I am not contorting my already questionable use of the English language with accents. Just imagine them.

"English" :: ^German^ :: {French} :: |Bulgarian|

~Parseltongue~ :: *Familiar Speech

Chapter 35: News and Guests

Second week of July, Harry was sitting in one of the common rooms of the Manor when Sirius poked his head into the room.

"I remembered what it was I wanted to tell you. The Tri-Wizard Cup is being held at Hogwarts. Thought you should know." He pulled his head back out and left

Harry froze at the sudden randomness of that, before getting up, and running out of the room, yelling "SIRIUS!"

Fifteen minutes of chasing, and a dozen or so objects transfigured into cats, Harry finally started getting details out of Padfoot.

"Geese Harry, no need to get your hair in a knot. Seriously, what can be so bad about it?"

Harry shot his godfather a look that would curdle milk and said, "Fate hates me, absolutely loves to kick me when I am down, and the wizarding world's closest analogue to a blood sport is coming to Hogwarts. I bet you fifty galleons that I am forced to compete in the god damn thing."

All the Marauder could do was blink at this, then saying, in a rather quiet voice, "Oh yeah."

"Well anyway, instead of bringing the normal list of potential champions, both of the participating foreign schools are moving the

entirety of their student bodies to Hogwarts, which itself is getting the east and west wings renovated, with the inclusion of a number of spacial expansion charms, to house the Durmstrang and Beauxbatons contingents."

"Bloody marvelous the school is going to be absolutely packed this year. Thanks for the warning Padfoot. I've got some research to do."

Harry scowled at the Black, and started transfiguring most of the smaller objects in the room into cats.

Making Sirius scream like a little girl may not have been much, but payback was payback.

Harry was pacing back and forth in the dining room, two days later, his nose in a linking book that read "Chronomancy" on the cover. Yes, time magics were frowned upon by the Ministry. Yes, they were dangerous on a large enough scale. But he was going to have a working knowledge of the two most commonly used applications of that particular field of magic, damn the consequences.

Time was one of the few things that when you truly needed it, it was damn near impossible to get more of. So that was why he was taking the time, while he had it, to study up on Time Compression and Stasis Spells.

"Hello Harry."

"Uncle Nic. Did you and Aunty Pen get my letters?"

"Of course we did Harry. But Pen and I need to talk to you about something face to face, and I thought that I might introduce you to a few lessons of my own making. You okay to coming to the cottage for a few weeks?"

"Is it wrong that the part about a talk has me worried?"

"No, in fact the subject of the discussion is quite worrisome."

"Give me ten minutes to throw a bag together and I can go now."

"Sure thing Harry. You do know..."

"That dabbling in Time Magics is dangerous and fool hardy? Yes. But the goddamn Tri-Wizard is coming to Hogwarts."

"... .. That is not good. Knowing that you are, as you like to put it, Fate's chew toy, I fear that you are going to end up competing, one way or another."

"Yup. Which reminds me, I really need to write Griphook and get him to transfer my proxy for the twenty-five percent of the Daily Prophet that I own over to Sirius. I keep forgetting. That will give us at least a fifty-five percent controlling interest in the paper. More if Paddy has been buying up shares. Oh, goody we can get rid of the gossip monger herself. I really, really hate reading anything by Rita Skeeter. She is just a horrible, horrible person."

After setting his bag down in his room at the cottage, Harry joined Nicolas and Perenelle at the kitchen table. There was a pain in the pit of his stomach, a warning that he couldn't ignore, telling him that whatever it was that they were going to be talking about would hurt, and not in anyone of the myriad of physical ways that he could simply ignore.

Apparently they had decided that Nic would be the one to start, as he spoke first and said, "We're not sure how to tell you this Harry, so I am just going to come out and say it. Perenelle and I are dying."

Harry froze. It felt like he had been punched in the gut while something squeezed his heart. And as a testament to how hard this news hit him, he was unable to form a coherent sentence, "But... I... you... Stone... Elixir..."

Pen smiled sadly, and spoke softly, "Well, at least we know your doing research skips no subject. As soon as we entrusted the Stone Dumbledore's," she spat the name out like a profanity, "tender care, he destroyed it. He gave us a song and dance about how such an object should not exist due to how easily it could fall to evil use. I swear, if the British Magical World would survive his passing, I would have ended the man. But no..." This started a good ten minute rant about how deeply Dumbledore had managed to insert himself into the Ministry of Magic, and how the fools there would not be able to do even the simplest of jobs without their 'Leader of the Light'.

Harry and Nic smiled and nodded. The one prank Harry had played here had gotten him an hour long tongue lashing, and it was not something he wanted pointed at him again. Nicolas knew better than to interrupt one of his wife's tirades. You really get to know someone after more than half a millennium of marriage.

Finally running out of steam, she said, "Now, where were we?"

"Destroyed Stone, Aunty Pen."

"Ah yes. Now, whenever we take it out of hiding, we stock up on enough Elixir to last us a decade..."

"So you still have six years left?"

Nic smiled sadly, "We would if the Elixir maintained its potency after the Stone's destruction, but..."

Harry let out a pained chuckle/sigh, "No such luck?"

Pen shook her head, saying, "If the rate remains constant, we'll be dead shortly before you are back in Hogwarts for your fifth year."

Harry stared down at the table, unable to ignore the pain in his chest. "Isn't there anything that you can do?"

Nicolas shook his head and said, "It takes seven years to make a Stone. We had contemplated starting another, but we've both seen and done so much, we decided we were ready to move on. Nobody really knows what lays on the other side of death Harry. When a person is ready, they can see death as it truly is, the next adventure."

Harry couldn't help but nod at this statement, no matter how much he wanted to disagree with it. "Okay. So, that is the horrible, dreadful thing you wanted to talk to me about... What were the lessons you wanted to give me?"

"Alchemy, enchanting, and how to build your own magical foci."

Harry spent from then until the morning of the thirtieth, his face pressed into the grindstone. Alchemy, as it was explained to him, was the creation of magical (mostly non-organic) substances. When

Harry asked, it was pointed out to him that the almost all magical substances that existed were plants or came from animals. That being the case, Harry was given extensive reading in chemistry (which he already had a good grounding in) and metallurgy. Nicolas also started pounding as much potions knowledge as possible into Harry's head.

Enchanting was the imbuing of long term effects into objects. This was usually done one of two chief ways. The first, and easier of the two, was simply anchoring a cast spell onto a (usually) small rune array. The second, and more profound, of the two was to use large detailed rune arrays to describe the desired effects, and then simply power the object. The drawback of the former was that the enchantment had a tendency to drop, and superstition held that it would always happen at the worst possible moment. The latter was the fact that the rune arrays almost always had to be compressed to make them fit onto objects fit for human use, and the drain of magical power from some of the grander arrays would be insane. The material the enchanted object was made out of was always import, with higher quality trumping low (using cloth as an example, higher thread count would be a good measure, with silk being better than cotton) with a magical material always being far superior to non-magical.

Given Magical Briton obsession with wands (explained being partially due to their versatility, and partially due to the ease of tracking their use), magical foci was something Harry was told was over looked by most, with Perenelle telling Harry how much of an advantage his Shield Ring would be. Next to no-one would expect him to be able to project a shield with a gesture of his left hand (He was apparently completely incapable of motionless casting with it) and if he could learn to use multiple foci at once... Well the results would not be pretty for anyone going against him. All foci comprised of at least a core (usually something from a highly magical creature or an amalgam of materials) that would work in sync with the wielder's core, and a conductor for the magical energy. Often rune arrays would be used to enhance the focus, especially those that have a more specific purpose (Harry's Shield Ring being an example). And this discipline shared the fact that magical materials are superior to non-magical.

Which rather easily explained why he was also being taught Alchemy, two of the fields of study being greatly enhanced by the

first. Also included was the gift of a set of gloves that were a focus which eased the use of a set of spells Nicolas said were used for making... things. From silverware and swords to chairs and safes. Using the spells on magical materials were more tiring than the mundane, but if you are going to do something, do it right (in this case making materials with Alchemy and making sure that the focus or enchanted object turns out how you want it to).

Harry also learned that the Flamels apparently needed even less sleep than he did.

Our hero of the ill luck was roused out of his room long before dawn by Nicolas.

"Get dressed for a walk through the woods, we have one more thing at the cottage to do before we get you back to the Manor this evening, so that you will be there for your birthday tomorrow."

"You know, even if I only sleep about two hours a night, I still like to rest when the sun had gone to its own bed."

"Yeah, well, we need to get where we're going by dawn, and walking is the only way to get there."

Harry grumbled good naturedly, but started getting dressed.

"Oh yeah, Sirius forwarded your Hogwarts letter, so Perenelle is taking you shopping."

And he turned and left.

Harry blinked several times while his jaw did an impression of a fish's out of water. Aunt Pen wouldn't just get him the minimum needed for school. He'd be getting new robes for both in school and out of it, probably some dress robes too. And then she would drag his ass into muggle London to round out his wardrobe.

He dropped to his knees, turned his face to the ceiling, and reached out to the sky with his hands, palms up. He howled out one word in a despairing scream.

"Nooooooooooooooooooooo!"

Nicolas came back into the room, shaking his head. "Must you be such a drama queen?"

Harry turned to the man with an insane grin on his face. "Of course I must. I am the son of a Marauder who lives with two of the others. It is in my nature."

As the pair walked through the woods, Nicolas gave Harry one last lecture, while he held a lamp in his hand.

"As you know, most foci are broken into two categories. Primary, or generalized, foci; such as your wand, and secondary, or specialized, foci; such as your shield ring. There is one last category though. You have noticed that we have never even mentioned one of the more iconic magical foci, the staff."

"I just assumed it was another kind of primary. I never really found that much about them in my reading, and haven't really cared all that much to be honest."

"You haven't found that much on staff lore because it is very carefully controlled, even in family libraries. It tends to be reserved for the family Book of Shadows, though even then it only really applies to very old families."

He took a breath and ducked under a low tree branch.

"The reason for this is staves fall under the third heading for magical foci, apex foci. They are always powerful. But you cannot just go out and get a staff made. The person who constructs a staff and the one who wields it must be one and the same. And besides which, the use of any apex focus is prone to backlash. Used too often and for too long, your core will start to become unstable. That, and the hand holding the focus will start to become injured due to the sheer amount of magic pouring through it."

It was at this point that they came into a clearing in the forest, and the sky was starting to turn the gray of dawn. In the center of the clearing was a bone white tree, about one hundred feet tall, the trunk looking like it was comprised of large, straight, two inch-thick rods of wood instead of bark, and the branches seemed to curve to make a sphere. The leaves were silver and the seemed to glow gently in the predawn dark. To Harry's magical senses, the tree

shone as bright as the noonday sun, while singing with a very gentle and extremely ancient strength.

"This is the reason Perenelle and I built are home nearby. We've spent the last century studying this tree. It is extremely old and immensely powerful." Harry nodded dumbly at this statement. It was painfully obvious to his senses that tree radiated magic. "And it also seems to possess some kind of awareness. What you are going to do walk up to the tree, channel some magic into the palm of your hand, and hope that it gives you something."

"That's it?"

"Yup."

"You've got to be kidding me."

"Nope. The thing apparently likes Pen better than me, too. Most of the time she is the only one the blasted thing will give a sample to."

Harry's reply dripped with sarcasm, "Comforting."

Sighing Harry walked up to the tree and said, "You know, I feel like a complete and utter fool doing this. I hope the extremely old man ("Hey, I heard that you whippersnapper!") isn't just messing with me."

He placed his hand against the tree, feeling both a physical warmth coming from it, along side the mild heat and slight vibration of its magic. He pushed a little of his own magic out through the palm of his hand and then felt a slight shift in the energies. One of the rods, a little over six feet in length came loose from above Harry and hit him in the head.

Falling on his ass and cursing, he frowned as the magic around the tree took on a note that could only be described as... amusement. "Oh, you think it is funny don't you? Beating me in the head with a length of lumber... Well let's see how you like it when I cover your branches in bog rolls!" The magic shifted, being something that could only be outright laughter. "Yeah, yeah. Laugh it up, you quasi-sentient magical heap of wood."

Picking up the blank for his staff, Harry made his way back to Nicolas. "Uncle Nic, your magical tree has a twisted sense of humor."

Harry stumbled through the Floo, glad that the tort... err, shopping was finished. Aunt Pen had insisted on completely and totally replacing his entire wardrobe. He didn't new socks, besides which he knew at least three spells that would darn them. What the bloody hell was it with women and shopping. He could have sworn Nic was laughing at him.

Harry made his way towards the kitchen, the results of 'operation: I hate shopping' shrunken in his pockets, his thoughts vaguely on mooching some food off the elves. He opened the door to find...

A small slip of a young, long haired blond, cute as a button girl, who couldn't be much more than seven years old. Harry blinked a few times, felt his magical senses tingle at something that wasn't quite normal about her (he ignored it for later contemplation), and then yelled the first thing that came to mind to confirm that this was in fact the Manor.

"Dobby!"

One pop later, and Harry is standing beside a hyper house-elf, "Yes, Master Harry Potter sir!"

"This is the Manor, right?"

The elf responded, with a rather confused tone, "Yes, Master Harry Potter sir..."

"And no one informed me that we apparently have at least on guest because?"

"Master PaddyFooty thought it would be funny, Master Moony couldn't be bothered, and Mistress Bella wanted to see how you would react to Master PaddyFooty."

"Assemble the kittens and catnip Dobby, and await my orders."

"Aye, aye PrankMaster Harry Potter sir!"

And the elf poofed away. All through this rather insane exchange, the little girl just watched a bit dazedly.

"Hello, I'm Harry."

She responded in English nigh unrecognizable underneath a French accent, "Hello, my name is Gabrielle Delacour."

Harry sighed, and then switched languages, {I assume that it would be easier if I spoke French?}

She giggled and then said, {Then why didn't you just start with it?}

{I didn't know you were French, obviously.}

She nodded excitedly.

{So, Gabrielle, you want to see an old man get pranked?}

She squee-ed.

{I'll take that as a yes.}

Harry walked into one of the sitting rooms to find Padfoot talking with a strong featured man of medium height and solid (as in sportsmen not Vernon) build.

Sirius grinned manically and said, "Hi pup."

The other man rose and was promptly glomped by Gabrielle.

The man picked the girl up and set her on his shoulders, and said, "You must be Harry. I see you have already met my daughter Gabrielle. I am Jean-Paul Delacour."

"A pleasure to meet you sir. Do you mind if I interrupt your conversation with my reprobate of a Godfather?"

"Not at all young man."

"Dobby!"

A poof, and the house-elf asks, "Yes, Master Harry Potter sir?"

"First, if you have to call me master, can you at least cut it down to Harry, and drop the constant sir. It was amusing the first hundred or so times, but is starting to give me a headache, and second commence 'Operation: Let Slip the Cats of War'."

"Hai, tiachou!"

"I never should have taught him Japanese..."

He poofed away for all of two seconds before coming back and dumping a bucket of catnip on the Lord Black, followed shortly thereafter by a basket of kittens. Sirius ran squealing like a pig and screaming like a little girl from the room.

Harry yelled after him, "That's what you get for not informing me that some French people were coming to the Manor!" He turned to Dobby and said, "Thank you very much, you may help yourself to three or four of the candies I keep in my sock drawer." The elf cackled like a mad man and poofed away.

Harry turned back to the apparent guests of the Manor. Jean-Paul was chuckling while Gabrielle was giggling madly from her perch.

"So, now that I've dealt with that, what manner of misfortune brings you to the mad Manor of the Marauders?"

Chuckling a few more times, "With the Quidditch World Cup being held in a few weeks somewhere on this island, one of my wife's friends saying there was plenty of room at her home, and me being in dire need of a vacation, our family decided to spend some time in England."

Harry nodded a few times and said, "Sirius should have gotten most of the kittens off by now, I am going to go and do... something. I assume I'll meet everyone else at breakfast?"

"Of course."

"Have a good evening sir." {And you too, Gabrielle.}

"Have a good night Harry."

{Night Harry!}

A/N2: Calling it a chapter there. And if you want to blame me for not writing out the correspondence, do so where I can't hear you. I'm being lazy. So sue me.

Guesstimating when the Cup happened. I know it was sometime in August, shortly after Harry's birthday (I think). I should probably pull GoF out from my bookshelf so that I'm not going entirely from memory.

Next update will be Soon-ish©. Almost definitely nowhere near as long as this one took. Again, sorry about that.

A/N: As always, I give my thanks to those who take the time to review. Term is winding down, so that combined with the fact that parts of this were a terror to write, I am sorry that it took so long. And sometimes I seem to write myself into a corner...

Largest update ever though!

Last chapter brought about a bit of a landmark. Now featuring over 500,000 hits. Hows them apples for less than four months on the site?

"English" :: ^German^ :: {French} :: |Bulgarian|

~Parseltongue~ :: *Familiar Speech*

Chapter 36: World Cup

"Good god almighty, reading these things is depressing..."

Harry ran a hand through his hair as he went over some of the postmortem files he had gotten his hands on. He was currently reading the appendix medical history from a file about a Polish metamorph who had been a duelist.

"Generalized recovery time from injuries seems to be anywhere from thirty-two to forty-five percent faster than Healer's estimates, with the exception of those times where magical exhaustion occurs concurrently..."

Harry picked up the journal that he was using to keep his notes handy and flipped to the page where he had kept the data of this particular type. It wasn't much, only five entries, soon to be six. Four Sorcerers and a High Sorcerer. Now a Mage. He doubted that he would get any records on an Archmage, let alone an Adept.

He'd always been curious about why the hell he had always seemed to heal overnight. Now he had his answer... Apparently a metamorphs power worked on an automatic level to keep a body healthy, and the amount of magical power a person had would make it more effective.

And the fact that he would heal so damn quickly when the lion's share of his power had been stolen was a disturbing thought. He rolled his shoulders and picked up the next file. Sometimes only sleeping upwards of two hours a night really sucked.

At times it got really boring when there was no one to bother...

Harry watched as he used his, what he had finally decided to call (just for the sake of ease/laziness) telekinesis (if it looks like a duck, quacks like a duck, and smells like a duck, it is a goddamn duck), to work on two Rubik cubes while he bounced a little red rubber ball on the back of his hand.

He was sitting in the dining room and it was roughly seven o'clock in the morning. He was idly wondering when someone would wake up, so that he would have someone to talk to. What part of his thoughts that were not one the toys, longing for conversation, and boredom were focused on some... ideas for more... destructive solutions to issues that would come up when he was to be forced (kicking and screaming, albeit in a more dignified manner) to compete in the Tri-Wizard Cup.

He was considering the various explosives he would be able to field by the time summer was over. He was idly drawing up the runic equivalents of mines and grenades, but why stop there when there are oh so ever many ways to skin a cat (and thinking of that, he started a new thought thread on ways to get Bella back for her part in the decision to keep him in the dark about there being guests in the Manor). He had enough hints that he may very well be able to field something roughly related to Greek Fire through his work with potions and then was the possibilities he had in alchemy. He idly made a note to do some research on mundane explosives.

As the door opened quietly, and before the person entering the room even stepped through, Harry said, "Good morning", before turning his head toward the door.

A blond, tallish and willowy, beautiful beyond belief (even Harry would admit to the fact no matter how little of a chance he believed he would ever have with anyone of the female persuasion), and somehow managing to affect an air of grace even when she was half asleep, walked into the room. His Mage Sense registered something that he had only noted from Hagrid and Professor Flitwick.

She wasn't entirely human, and he noted that the feeling was a more active version of what he had gotten off of Gabrielle. Where Hagrid's non-human magic gave off a feeling brute physical strength and slowness of thought and Flitwick's spoke of shrewd cunning and deftness of hands, her energy, for lack of better word, sang of air, fire, and an allure that would drag men in. Harry wondered for a moment what that meant, as he had yet to have any particular reason to study up on magical beings it threw him for a complete loop.

As her magic was being felt by his senses, he felt something brush up against his Occlumency shields. The closest he would put the feeling to was what he had felt the Dementors do. But instead of the cold of pure fear, there was a warmth, bordering on heat, that seemed to whisper 'come hither'.

And all this seemed to take place in a matter of seconds for him.

She blinked for a moment and then rubbed her eyes with the back of her hand, and then mumbled with a thick French accent, "Morning... I didn't expect someone to actually be up..."

She then called for the elf that was in charge of the kitchen in the mornings... Flippy. She asked for a large stack of pancakes, with Harry piping in a request for fruit.

She yawned a few times, still apparently waking up. The she noticed the Rubik cubes floating in front of Harry, seemingly being solved of their own accord. She rubbed at her eyes a second time and then pinched herself on the forearm. In her shock she reverted to her native tongue and said, {I am fairly certain that it is some kind of wandless magic, but how?}

Harry smiled broadly, (slightly) happy to have someone to talk with, and deciding to practice his French, {I'm not entirely sure, it started with me practicing wandless banishers, summoners, and hover charms. Then it just kind of... mutated from there when I started wondering just how much fine control I have...}

{Until you ended up with something that roughly resembles telekinesis?}

{Yup!}

At that particular carefree comment her left eyebrow twitched in a manner that had Harry fighting down a laugh.

She then said, {You are not entirely sane, are you?}

{Is anyone?}

{It is too early in the morning to play philosophy, are you or are you not insane?}

{I claim the defenses of coping mechanism, self-incrimination, and being sane when I started living with crazy people...}

{Do you ever give a straight answer?}

Harry grinned manically as a bowl of fruit appeared in front of him and he started juggling an apple, an orange, and a pear. {Depends on the subject of the conversation.}

{And what subjects, pray tell, do you take seriously?}

{Academia subjects that are clearly not a joke (he coughed something that vaguely sounded like divination), culture that isn't ridiculous (he again coughed sounding like 'what little of it'), and life threatening situations. Everything else is fair game and a part of me really wants to go out with an off-color limerick or something as amusing on my lips, so I may very well end up joking around when my life is in danger anyway.}

She shook her head ruefully, and said, {You do not act like anyone your age that I have ever met.}

Harry caught the fruit he was juggling, and lengthened his nails to start peeling the rind from the orange. His face fell, and a look of deathly seriousness crossed his face, {That is because England's Boy-Who-Lived is a barely functioning parody of what it is to be human.}

She was brought to a full stop by his sudden change in mannerisms. It took her a moment to gather her thoughts to say, in a rather puzzled tone, {I am sorry?}

{Meh, I thought it would probably be best to get that out of the way. I figure if we were to actually become friendly, I will tell you the reasons why. Part of me is amazed I am as seemingly sane as I am.}

She had a confused look on her face for a moment, before she simply nodded at that, and said, {Well, you seem like you can at least carry on a reasonably intelligent conversation... as insane as it is. My name is Fleur, Fleur Delacour.}

{It is a pleasure to meet you, Fleur. I am Harry Potter, Fate's Bitch. Besides which, I actually find talking to crazy people quite enlightening, you never know when something brilliant will appear in the madness. So, are you actually a fan of Quidditch, or are you just along for the 'family vacation'?}

She grinned and the conversation wandered on from there.

The birthday party was much like the one that Harry had had during the summer after his first year, with the largest difference being the gifts he was now given were almost in their entirety books, with an exception or two for 'Quidditch stuff'.

The Delacours had chosen that day for a family outing to go sight-seeing in muggle London. The explanation that they gave was that they did not want to impose during Harry's birthday, and so they were going to excuse themselves from the festivities.

Before leaving the twins griped to Harry about Ronald's constant complaining about his rat, Scabbers, having gone missing. The twins were of the opinion that the rat, which they believed was rather old, had simply scampered away somewhere in the castle and died of old age. Their mother had not been very pleased when Ronniekins had gone crying to her about the twins telling him his pet was dead. They swore revenge of the pranking kind for the little crybaby tattletale.

Hermione had asked to borrow one of his new books on her way out. Harry often wondered if something was wrong with her brain chemistry that made reading an addiction for her. Not that he couldn't say he read less than her, he just made the excuse he had yet to accumulate enough hobbies to remove reading as a leisure time activity.

Nev asked Harry if he had ever thought of bugging Sirius into (somehow) adding a greenhouse to the manor. Neville (and his love of all growing things) had introduced Harry to a rather interesting idea, that was sadly thrown away for the fact that the only reason to do that was for homegrown potions ingredients, and Harry was nowhere near that badly pressed to save money.

Though he did start kicking around the idea of appropriating one of the labs to grow... something. He just wasn't sure what yet. Maybe roses (which triggered the relief that he was finally over a bit of the damage Dursleys' had done to him if he could think of gardening as something to kill time instead of torture) that would be a nice hobby... but then again, he spent about three-fourths of the year away from home...

Harry spent the few weeks split between his usual studying habits, his usual training habits, making a list of possible hobbies so that he could avoid draining the Potter library dry before Fate stopped finding him amusing and decided to put him out of his misery, and getting to know the house guests (and Bella).

Gabrielle was a bright little ray of sunshine, like almost all seven year old girls are. As long as Harry tried to be amusing in some way, she managed to be all bubbly and giggly. She was also a right little terror when she didn't get her way, so Harry kept her as distracted as possible when he was in her company for any length of time.

Jean-Paul was apparently the French equivalent of Head Auror... and when he found out Harry had a secondary shield focus, he practically dragged the Potter Heir to the sparring room. The next half an hour Harry spent either on the move or behind various shield spells. Harry could tell that the man was going easy on him (as compared to Sirius who would often add his own potshots in when he was having Harry dodge incoming spellfire from the training dummies), though when Jean-Paul finally stopped and told him he was exceptional in shielding and dodging for someone who hadn't even finished his O.W.L.s (though the man had originally mentioned the french equivalent and had to clarify).

When he asked why Harry was so skilled at those two particular skills, Jean-Paul only got four words in response.

"He is not dead."

Confusion, understanding, and a touch of fear crossed the man's features, before he finally said, "Hit me with you best non-lethal shot."

Harry snapped off a chain of ten to fourteen (he no longer kept track of how long his spell chains of this kind were) spells, consisting mainly of nuisance curses with a few low power bludgeoners and stunners. The man tried to dodge to the left to find himself boxed in by a gout of flame, and was forced to shield a trio of stunners, before yelling, "Stop!"

He continued, "Remind me never to underestimate you again Harry. Or allow you a free shot. Were those silent?"

"Sub-vocal mostly, except the stunners and a few of the nuisance curses. I've also cut all the wand movements for most of that down to half, though I've almost got my stunners down to point casting."

Jean-Paul looked at the teenager in front of him questioningly.

Harry rolled his eyebrows and said, "He'll claw his way back into a body sooner or later, and Dark Lords are known for their egos. I'll be his first and biggest target. I don't intend to go down in anything other than a great, big, spectacular mess."

The Frenchman nodded and said, "That tends to be the motto of Hit Wizards the world over."

"I'll remember that if I live long enough to have a career."

Jean-Paul then gave Harry a few dozen tips on dueling, and an invitation to bombard him with owls if the young man ever needed more advice in combat.

As for Mrs. Delacour, Apolline, Harry didn't have much contact with outside of meals and a time or two Harry spent getting to know Bella (which netted Harry a few good stories involving his mother, one of which was infinitely amusing and involved stripping Sirius of his dignity by means of a bottle of fire whiskey, ten pounds of feathers, and a potion which caused him to glow pink) and what he did learn was that what ever magical being they came from, it was not active

in either of their parents. He idly wondered if it was a female trait that skipped a generation through their father. What he found out about the woman was that she was a fierce stickler for good manners at the table and had a particularly sharp tongue when it came to enforcing said manners.

As for Fleur, they spent time occasionally talking, either about academics (Fleur was at first (pleasantly) surprised that Harry though going into his fourth year could keep pace with some of the topics she brought up), both magical and mundane culture (in which Harry voiced that English wizarding culture hadn't changed in at least a century (probably more) (Fleur agreed and she pointed out it was the same for most of Europe, except it was only a few decades rather than centuries, as for the mundane, Harry was only irreverent at a few things that were called 'art' (Fleur was once more surprised at how much he knew, which Harry blew off as being a result of too much free time and wanting to read something different, and therefore digging out a magazine or book on a new subject)), and some of the things they did for enjoyment (Harry pointed out his obvious 'mad scientist' habits, Fleur apparently liked to knit (when Harry froze up in disbelief, she unshrunk a bag, and lo and behold, knitting stuff!))).

Of course the topic of the Tri-Wizard Cup eventually came up...

{I am going to at least submit my name for the competition.}

{I am going to say two things. First would be the obligatory 'good luck', and the second is going to have to be me pointing out the fact that I have yet to have what would amount to a normal school year in the magical world, and that no one who knows me is willing to match my twenty galleons on the feeling I have that somehow, somehow I am going to be forced to compete.}

{And just how would you be forced to compete?}

{I've done a lot of research into the Tri-Wizard using the Potter Library...}

Harry had mentioned the Potter Library one of the times they had talked of their studies, and the young woman had gotten a far off look in her eyes at the mention of all those books. She still got that

look whenever he mentioned the treasure trove of books, it unsettled him a little.

{And what I've found is that they use an object called the Goblet of Fire as an impartial judge to determine the contestants.}

{Really? And what have you found on this Goblet Harry?}

A look of distaste crossed his face, and he continued, {That a similar object makes appearances in wizarding history as early as Rome and the Colosseum. It was used to bind magical beings into the Games. It made it so that they would have to compete to the best of their abilities, or else suffer from the counter-measures installed into it.}

For a few minutes all that passed between the two were silence, and then she asked, {Has anyone in the history of the Tri-Wizard been entered against their will? And, I'm a little afraid to ask, but counter-measures?}

Harry sighed, and then said, {Unknown. There is nothing in the accounts of each of the times the Tri-Wizard took place, but it could have just been covered up... As for the counter-measures, it is quite simple. Pain. Great pain that increases until either the subject complies or dies.}

She frowned at the first fact, turned slightly green (which failed to mar her beauty), and then said, {If you don't mind me asking, do you know how the Goblet chooses the contestants.}

{It will pick whoever will give the best show. From what I've been able to dig up on studies about it, the level of intelligence and awareness that it has is actually quite frightening. It can apparently take into account skill and power level, with other variables following. During Rome's bloodsports it never failed to arrange a good show.}

{So, if someone puts your name into the Goblet...}

{I'm betting on my involvement coming out of left field as the Yanks say, so I think that a good many people are going to be... irritated with the English when the Champions are chosen.}

{You do know that you could just be paranoid.}

{Well to that I have at least two answers. The first is that if you are expecting the worst, then when it doesn't happen you can be pleasantly surprised, but if it does you are armed and ready for bear. The second is that just because you are paranoid doesn't mean that someone isn't out to get you. Hell I think Fate takes joy in my suffering, I got attacked by the almost every last Dementor that was stationed at Hogwarts for no other reason than I was in the wrong place at the wrong time.}

{When you put it that way, how likely is it that you think I could win against you?}

{I've been slowly getting myself ready with the belief that Voldemort is not in the grave and that one of his primary goals will be my death. My forced competition in the Tri-Wizard will be like me waging war against however many tasks there are.}

She laughed, and he felt the energy around her brush up against his shields as she said, {Now I don't know who to feel sorry for, you, the other Champions, or the tasks themselves...}

{How about all of the above?}

A week before the World Cup was set to take place, all of the adults decided that, even though they all had seats that would entitle them to arrive the day before in order to get their seats, they would be remiss to skip the opportunity to camp among so many other wizards from around the world.

Sirius had managed to somehow snag a reservation right by one of the water spigots (he said his reasoning was that all of the maps had the water spigots marked and anyone who wanted to find them could just go to water spigot).

They set up all of one tent, but what a tent it was. Everyone had their own room, with a couple to spare, there was a three to one ratio of people to bathrooms, which a few of the womenfolk complained about, but was still viewed as 'acceptable'.

One issue was that this was technically a muggle camping ground, and so Harry's familiars (well the two that couldn't disguise themselves, as Leon was quite smug about being able to perfectly

imitate a husky with a black and dark gray coat) had to be put under glamors. Isis looked like some sort of constrictor and Hedwig was back to looking like a snowy owl.

Not fifteen minutes after they had finished setting up, at around about three in the afternoon, Harry was dive-bombed by an owl. Taking the letter, he asked the owl if it would mind waiting to make a return trip. He read the letter as he stepped into the tent looking for parchment and ink, with the owl on one shoulder, and Hedwig making it known to the interloper that Harry was hers by taking up her place on the other.

Five minutes later the owl was winging away, with a reply to Ivan.

Not fifteen minutes later, as Harry was walking around the outside of tent reading a book, he put his book down, and grinned. He then caught up in a great big bear hug, and bodily lifted from the ground..

|Argh, Ivan, put me down you stinking Cossack!|

|Bah, you are just most displeased that a large person like me can life a rag doll like you.|

As his friend set him back down on the ground, Harry got a good look at his friend. He had sprouted up to somewhere in the mid five foot range, and his build resembled what Harry thought a medieval warrior would have. His dirty blond hair now reached to his shoulders and looked like a shaggy mess, while his eyes had taken on a distinctly yellow hue. Harry half closed his eyes for a moment and felt the magic around his friend.

And his eyes snapped open a moment later. |How close to controlling it are you?|

|Very close. With the 'bane the transformations do not even hurt anymore, and we've started playing with my dosage. The beast is completely in my control during even the fullest moon at only half of what I need to take.|

|Congratulations, my very large friend. Any particular reason we are speaking Bulgarian?|

|Because, I wanted to see if you speak it as well as you write it, and finally put to rest my family's disbelief that I have Harry Potter as a pen-pal.|

|Should I bring the menagerie or have them stay here?|

|If they don't mind staying...|

~I am quite comfortable lying here in the sun, Harry...~

If it's no trouble when you gone, get me a ham. If you can't get me a ham, have the dogman that is afraid of cats or the wolfman that is afraid of bunnies get me some fresh meat... And then see about instilling a fear of mice into the catlady. That would make some of the various insanities around here at least seem balanced.

Hedwig's answer was to come perch herself on Harry's shoulder for a moment to affectionately nibble his ear and then flew off.

|The consensus is that they are quite fine here... Though Leon seems to be hungry.|

Ivan chuckled as he placed a large arm around Harry's shoulders and half-dragged the boy-who-lived off.

A short walk, during which Harry and Ivan discussed who they felt sorry for, the muggles who were Obliviated repeatedly when they saw the wizards showing off (even Ivan found the tents with his brother's photo plastered all over them in bad taste, while Harry couldn't help but pity whoever thought making their tents look like small green hillocks was a good idea), or the Oblivators being forced to work overtime with the sheer amount of work they had ahead of them.

They eventually came to the conclusion that it was at best six of one and half a dozen of the other, so everyone was to be felt sorry for, including themselves who had to witness this travesty of people in large groups acting like complete morons.

After what both found to be a walk that was both entertaining and despairing (Ivan said, |How the hell the non-magicals haven't figured it out yet is beyond me|), they reached the set of tents where

apparently a good portion of the Bulgarian team's families had set up, including Ivan's.

As they stepped into the tent belonging to the Were's family, he gave a rather cheeky grin and yelled out, |For those of you who did not believe me about the identity of my pen-pal, may I introduced, Harry Potter, The-Boy-Who-Lived...|

|And Fate's Whipping Boy!|

Ivan's mother and father were present, with Viktor having a practice session with his team. One of the first thing the pair of parents did was to apologize to their son for not believing him. The conversation from there varied from why the hell The-Boy-Who-Lived was at a werewolf retreat, Quidditch, what his studies were like and how well he did (Ivan and Harry got off on a tangent on just how many potions knives a person needed, with Harry supporting the side of the argument that you could never have enough blades, so long as each one was a different metal, Ivan debating the point that a basic potions kit included all the knives a student would need), more Quidditch, magical creatures (Harry was of the opinion that unicorns got a bad rap, when the males were well known to gore people with their horns, |Sissy my left buttock| he said, Ivan just nodded in agreement with wide eyes, never having thought to think of it that way, while the Bulgarian's parents wondered how insane the most famous teen in wizarding England was), and, of course, Quidditch.

It was an hour and a half later, with Mr. and Mrs. Krum were watching Harry and Ivan debate the effectiveness of twins as Beaters (with Harry using his good friends/partners-in-pranking Fred and George as a prime example), when a young man, taller than Ivan, thin and sallow, with dark hair and eyes, slumped into a chair.

|I would have to agree with your friend here, Ivan, those twins sound like a right terror on the pitch... So who is your friend anyway?|

Ivan grinned maliciously as he introduced his brother to the pen-pal he said did not exist. Harry lifted his bangs with a smirk on his face. Viktor just sat there for a few minutes, completely gobsmacked. He then reached into his pocket and threw a small leather bag at his brother's head, which Ivan caught, grinning like the cat who caught the canary.

|Bah, don't be so pleased with yourself, it just seemed so... unlikely. So, my brother says you play Seeker for one of you school teams... What is your record?|

|Three years, three games a year, never missed a catch.|

Viktor smirked at that, and said, |Then how about...|

|No.|

The Quidditch super-star frowned and said, |But you didn't know what...|

|I am humble enough, thank you very much. I don't need an ass-kicking by a world class Seeker who made it to the Finals of the World Cup.|

Ivan just laughed at the surly look his brother got on his face, |Good god Vik, you don't have to be such a man-child about it.|

This got the younger brother a scowl and an harrumph from the elder, which only made Ivan laugh all the harder.

Harry was invited to stay for dinner, but left, saying he didn't want to impose. As he strolled through the woods, he felt something barrel into his leg. As he looked down, praying that it was not some other rare magical animal that has decided to 'adopt' him (Harry would latter swear that fate found the number of rare 'pets' it landed him with as amusing as all of the life threatening occasions), and saw what appeared to be a male lion, the size of a large house cat... with metallic fur the color of platinum.

Staring down at the animal, which was looking back with wide eyes, trying its very best to look cute, he said, "Yes yes, you are absolutely adorable, but I thought Nemean Lions were supposed to be golden in color... and much larger."

The only response that Harry got from the little blighter was a grin (which had him scratching his head at how a feline could do it so very clearly), a grin that reminded him of...

"Stop smiling that or I will name you Cheshire."

It kept on grinning at him.

"Goddamn it, you like that name don't you.

Grin.

Harry rolled his eyes, scooped up the animal, and started walking again. He absently started scratching the feline between the ears. It started purring.

"An absolutely adorable pain in my ass. And I have a feeling you are never going to tell me where the hell you came from."

When he got back to the tent, he got a few stares (almost entirely from the Delacours) and Gabrielle asked, {Where'd you get the kitty...}

{The kitty found me.}

{Why does it look like a little lion?}

{I was planning on asking it myself...}

Harry closed his eyes and then sent a message along the bonds he had with his familiars, *Isis, Leon, Hedwig, my room, right now, if you please.*

As Harry walked into his room, Gabrielle asked him, {But how are you gonna ask him, kitties can't speak.}

{Not unless they are a person's familiar. Then they can talk to their wizard.}

She made an adorable expression of understanding. While she was processing that bit of information, he ushered her out of his room, and then set Cheshire down on his bed. It immediately changed itself into a full size lion.

Which caused his bed to collapse.

Harry started swearing in a few different dialects spoken in China.

The meeting between Harry and his familiars yield that Cheshire was indeed a bonded familiar, and was capable of communicating with Harry and the other animals, it just apparently did not have all that much to say. As for the answers of what it was and where it came from, all the answers Harry got were a 'you don't know jack about Nemean Lions' to the former and laughter to the latter.

Harry left the room, contemplating how effectively he could Obliviate himself into blissful ignorance, Cheshire on his heels, back to his 'kitty' size. Throwing himself down into a chair at the kitchen table, he addressed Sirius, who was drinking some tea, "Oh my Godfather, the man-whore, another animal has adopted me under the guise of being my familiar. Just thought I should warn you."

Padfoot gagged and started coughing, the tea obviously not agreeing with either its drinker, or what he was hearing, after he finally finished coughing, he said, "Seriously Harry? That makes four now doesn't it? Can't you start turning them away or something?"

"Not bloody likely."

"So what is it?"

"He is apparently a platinum colored Nemean Lion, and instead of being a valid threat, he actually seems to like being called Cheshire."

Sirius just stared at his godson.

"I swear, if I ever survive past twenty, I will no longer be able to tell the strange from the normal. At least how those two words are defined in the wizarding world."

The next couple of days passed quickly enough, Harry having spent most of them outside, lying in the sun reading a book. Harry also took the occasional walk with Ivan (who got introduced to all of the people occupying the same tent as Harry, though there were some language barrier issues) where they pair of the pointed out the stupidity of various wizards, and offering their sympathy to any of the overworked Oblivators.

He also spent a little time with his friend's family, who apparently took a real shine to the young (forced) hero. Viktor still seemed a

little miffed at the fact that Harry had absolutely no interest in getting his ass handed to him, but otherwise, he got along decently with the only survivor of the killing curse.

They also talked about the fact that the full moon was taking place the day before the match, but Ivan's family kept a supply of the 'bane under stasis charms knowing this beforehand, so that Ivan would have a dose. Harry mentioned how Remus would be going back to the manor, to spend the night, even if he was also on the 'bane.

Harry went to bed the Friday night before the World Cup (though there were those who would call when he went to bed extremely early Saturday morning, where Harry would respond with a polite "stuff up you backside sideways, I only need, at most, two hours sleep"), and soon found himself pulled into an odder dream than normal.

He was sitting in a partially destroyed chair, in a ruined room. There was a short pudgy man there. The other details were hard to focus, and any sound seemed to be filled with static. The edges of what his eyes could were... fraying for lack of a better word.

A few snippets of a conversation were clear to him, he heard 'My Lord', 'Nagini', 'Wormtail' (a fire was lit in his mind at the mention of the traitor), 'Quidditch' 'Cup', his own name...

The conversation was interrupted when a man with whitish-yellow (platinum blond maybe) hair shoved an old looking man into the room.

It was at that time that the dream, or what ever it was, just seemingly dissolved, dropping Harry into the inner sanctum of his mind.

"That was most definitely not normal, and it was not one of those little retrospectives I think I have been treated to before..."

He started pacing back and forth, thinking. He had been planning an overhaul into how he organizes his thoughts, knowledge, and memory... Along with a few more... radical... ideas to implement in this place.

And one of those ideas could possibly give him some answers... If it worked.

He called forth a trio of chairs, and then created a two copies of himself, being careful to leave them completely untouched (internal thought-wise at least) by his conscious mind. He then stared to, ever so gently, push his instinctual mind toward one and his subconscious into the other.

He was not sure for how long he worked, with great care and gentleness, until he heard two voices speak at just about the same time. One, with harder edges than he normally had whispered out, "Damn..." while the other said, with a bit of unfocused distance in its voice, "It actually worked..."

Having closed his eyes in concentration, Harry opened them now, and saw the two... aspects of himself watching him intently. On his left, having discarded the glasses he always wore, was a Harry who kept his hair shorter, and it seemed even wilder than it used to be. His eyes were the same green he always (tried) to keep them, but the pupils were now vertically slit, like some kind of serpent... or dragon. He was grinning now, his canines were noticeably longer and sharper, and the grin itself was somewhat feral. His fingers on the armrests of the chair now ended in what looked like claws.

To his right, the changes were fewer, with hair much longer than he kept it in casual settings (let's face long hair is a liability in a fight or when doing potions (and now alchemy) work), with eyes a few shades paler and duller, and had a distant look on his face.

Harry-Prime ('I am going to drive myself even more insane' he thought) addressed his two aspects, "Well, gentlemen, we have work to do."

The pair nodded, and Subconscious-Harry said, "The dream that was not a dream correct?"

Prime nodded, and said, "Anything else?"

Subconscious closed his eyes for a moment, and then sighed say, "It originated from the lock-down, and that is all. It was already frayed from being locked away"

Instinct growled out one word, with infinite venom infused into it, "Voldemort."

Prime nodded, saying, "Probably. I... we? Should tell Padfoot at least."

Both of the aspects nodded their assent, and Prime forged on, "Now onto the second thing that has been bugging me... What the hell is our... my... Animagus form? All the mediation is giving me a positive for the ability, but jack shit on what it is."

Instinct made a thoughtful growling sound, closing his eyes for a moment. "Something draconic, that is the only read I can get on it. I think we need more information on dragons..."

Prime nodded, "Never seen one, nor had much interest in studying about them. I'll rectify that. Is there anything else either of you want to talk about?"

The aspects shook their heads, so Prime nodded, and then dissolved into thin air.

Instinct eyed Subconscious and said, "Think we should have told him that his repressing his attraction to Fleur?"

"And have it denied left, right, and center? No, no thank you."

"Think he'll make more aspects?"

"Who knows..."

Harry spent the rest of the night/early morning buried in his books, reports, and other readings. The first one up, as always, aside from him, was Fleur. She sat down in a seat across from him at the kitchen table.

{Morning, Harry. Reading anything interesting?}

Harry grunted, and said, {Didn't sleep well...}, by way of apology.

She grinned and said, {You sleep? You are usually still awake when the latest night-owl goes to bed, and still is the first up and ready to face the day.}

{I've never had my Occlumency rated, but I've been working on it since I've been eleven, and it has always been easy...}

She blinked at this bit of information. Yes, they had talked about the internal Mind Art (Harry refused to simply call it defensive when it did so much more) on occasion, and Harry had said it worked with it... {Just how little sleep do you get by on, Harry?}

He held up a pair of fingers.

{So why didn't you sleep well? Nightmare?}

A great rousing round of silence was her answer.

She looked at him for a moment, a frown on her face, and then asked, {Are there worse things in your sleep than nightmares?}

She got her answer by the sudden blanking of his face.

She closed her eyes for a few moments, at the thought of what worse things could await someone with such a hard life. She then got up, and said, {Have you eaten yet Harry?}

He shook his head.

{I'm making myself some pancakes, would like some?}

Again, a silent negative reply.

She couldn't help but worry about what could drive the mad ball of energy that Harry Potter apparently was into silence.

Sirius eventually dragged his backside out of bed, Harry grabbed him by the ear and pulled his godfather back into his bedroom. And then Harry unloaded what he had... seen... Sirius's face blanked when Harry said that he thought that Voldemort, Wormtail, and Lucy Malfoy were all together.

The two loyal Marauders and the heir to Prongs all knew well that the rat was still alive, they just didn't know where he was hiding. That he was now possibly planning with Voldemort and another

Death Eater... It was not good. Even worse was that Harry was mentioned in some way in the conversation.

"So, Siri, what are we going to do about it?"

"If I know you, you've been drawing up plans for armor of all shapes and sizes."

"True."

"What's the heaviest you've got planned?"

"Basilisk hide trench coat, boots, and gloves, with rune arrays for comfort, fit, mobility, and armor. I've got a strange brew in the works with my alchemy research that can convert leathers into textiles, with minor losses on durability and spell resistance. Still haven't gotten the mix quite right yet. It still destroys the material as often as it successfully changes it. Once I get that squared away, I'll make some clothes out of it and add similar rune arrays."

"Make underlays to wear under your everyday clothes out of the cloth, give you some protection even if someone gets the drop on you. You already know not to go anywhere without your wand. If you do run into snakeface, fight to kill, because you know he will. As for other things... Be careful, don't take strange objects from strangers, and if you are in danger, curse first and ask questions later. We don't know enough to make any other plans."

Harry nodded, and said, "I think I am going to go meditate, get centered..."

Sirius grinned and said, "It isn't good to be so serious..."

"True, why in the world would we need more of you around. One is already more than enough."

"Why you...!"

Harry spent the next day and a half holed up in his room. After the first six hours spent bringing himself back to normal (for him), he went over all the notes he had on his projects, specifically anything and everything on rune arrays that provide protection, both against spells and physical damage.

After cleaning up the work and tweaking the arrays to get some more efficiency out of them, he put them onto every piece of clothing that he had. He then started working on stringing together as nasty a spell chain as he could manage, bone exploders, explosions, high level fire, and worse things.

He finally crawled out of his room the morning of the twenty-second. The Quidditch World Cup was today.

Harry was sitting at the kitchen table, juggling fruit. Two apples, an orange, and a pear to be exact. He'd had company from his familiars for when he holed up (Cheshire was good company, general distaste of talking aside), but he could use some human conversation.

He idly pondered on the formula that would convert leather to textiles while he waited for someone to get up. Hopefully it wouldn't be too long of a match, something going into days... He wanted to get back to his things.

Fleur dragged herself into the kitchen with more grace than the majority of humanity manages to have in the morning, slumped into a chair, noticed Harry, and then blinked several times. {Morning Harry.}

He put the fruit down and got up out of his seat, and started looking around in the cabinets and ice-chest to figure out what he was going to make for breakfast, {Good morning Fleur. I want to say how sorry I am for how I acted on Saturday morning...}

{Something had upset you, there's no need to apologize... But...}

{You want to know what had me acting so unlike myself. What do you want to eat?}

She nodded and said, {Eggs and bacon?}

Pulling out what he would need for the meal, he said, {What had me so shaken stems from the fact that not all of the things I see when I dream come from my own head...}

There was silence for several minutes, broken only by the sounds of Harry cooking up the bacon, finally the first words spoken were, {So, how do you want you eggs today?}

The rest of the day rolled on, with talk of what upset Harry (whatever it was), falling to the wayside. Fleur had challenged Harry to a game of chess out of sheer boredom, and that is how they passed most of the day, sitting in the grass using a completely mundane chess set, chatting. Then dusk came, and everyone could feel the excitement in the air, and Harry would be getting ten galleons from Ivan next time he saw the Bulgarian, who had bet that the Ministry would give up sooner (before the day of the Quidditch Cup) rather than later, in their attempts to suppress blatant use of magic (never underestimate the stubbornness of the bureaucracy).

The Delacours were firm in their support of the Bulgarians, while the majority of the English contingent were rooting for the Irish.

Harry was all for both. He just wanted to watch a good match. He didn't buy much, never having had the urge to collect trinkets, settling on a pair of omnioculars, which were basically magical binoculars with lots of special features, and a program for the festivities of the World Cup.

When a gong finally sounded, everyone headed off toward the stadium.

Up in the Top Box of the stadium Harry found himself sitting between Fleur and an empty seat, which was soon filled by Ivan jumping over into from behind.

Harry started the conversation with a solid poke to the language barrier, "I don't know if we all share a language besides English..."

Ivan grunted and said, "My English is better than it was two years ago, and the only other language I know is German..."

Fleur nodded and said, "I can speak English if the situation calls for it, but that is the only other one I speak."

Ivan grunted and said, "Just how many languages do you speak Harry..."

"Including Troll?"

Fleur face-palmed at that quip while Ivan commented, "Troll consists of pointing and grunting, everyone speaks Troll, so no, don't count it..."

Harry grinned sheepishly, and said, "More than thirty..."

Fleur blinked at that and spoke "Do you think that it is one of your magical talents to learn languages?"

Harry shook his head and said, "I think that it is just a function of perfect memory and intellect."

They both nodded, and then proceeded to start looking everywhere and anywhere, curious about the stadium. Harry saw the Weasleys and Minister Fudge, and then he proceeded to get a good look at the massive stadium, after a few minutes he finally stuck his nose into the program.

"Says here that there is going to be a pregame show with mascots. Who wants to bet that the Irish brought leprechauns?"

Ivan sighed and said, "No. I am not getting fleeced by you Harry."

Fleur shook her head and spoke, "You're probably right Harry, I however am curious as to what the Bulgarians will show..."

Ivan grinned and said, "Wait and see, wait and see..."

Soon enough the havoc of one hundred thousand people being seated had settled down, and a voice, some announcer probably, said, "Welcome one and all to the final of the four hundred and twenty-second Quidditch World cup. And now we will begin with the Bulgarian National Team's mascots!"

The applause was rather deafening to the kicking off of the event, and onto the field walk... women? Harry arched an eyebrow at what was going on. Yes, certainly they were beautiful women but... He saw Fleur's eyes narrow at the corner of his field of vision and he heard her say something that sounded vaguely like, {Harlots...}, before she started vanishing everything she had that showed support of the Bulgarian team. He felt a brush along his shields

similar to what he sometimes felt around Fleur, but this was far stronger, and there were more of them, but the result of it was the same. Nothing.

Then the women started to dance. Harry felt a fire lit in his head... among other places, and the magic filling his being responded viciously. He clutched the sides of his head in pain and screwed his eyes shut, and then he recognized what he thought was his body countering a sudden spike in hormone and neurochemical production. He quickly sensed that the net result of the spike would focus on driving him into a frenzy to impress those of the female gender. That combined with what could have resulted from the allure touching his mind... Well it would leave him with very little dignity.

As he opened his eyes, he saw Fleur eying him. A look of surprise tinged with worry was on her face, and he offered her a weak smile before turning to look at the dancing... whatever they were with distaste. Harry didn't like it when anyone tried to play with his thought processes.

After the Bulgarian mascots at whipped the men of the crowd into a near frenzy, the Irish mascots ("And now, introducing the Irish Nation Team's mascots!"), leprechauns came out, did some rather delightful formation flying, before dumping gold onto the crowd.

Harry muttered, "Turn about is indeed fair play," as the announcer introduced the teams.

The game was vicious, Viktor managed to catch the Irish Seeker in a Wronski Feint, and Harry was fairly certain the man would be feeling it next week. The mascots of both teams got into a massive brawl, and the game ended with the Irish winning by ten points, with Viktor catching the Snitch.

Eventually they ended back at the tent, and they all spent some time talking about the game. The Delacours had changed their minds about the Bulgarian Team and were happy that they lost. Gabrielle's favorite parts were when Lynch, the Irish Seeker, ploughed himself into the ground the first time and when there was a brawl on the field.

Eventually everyone, except Harry, headed off to bed. Harry continued to sit at the table, reading about dragons and drinking a

cup of tea. An hour or two later, he heard a change in the ruckus outside, followed by a scream of terror.

He ran out of the tent, and caught a glimpse of people in black cloaks... with white masks. His eyes narrowed, and he hissed out two words as he spun on his heel and ran back into the tent.

"Death Eaters..."

Moments later, everyone else was up, Sirius, Remus, Bella, and Jean-Paul looking ready for a fight. Apolline made a comment about seeing if anyone had set up first aid tents and offering her help. Harry and Fleur were told in no uncertain terms that they were to take Gabrielle and hide in the woods.

As they made to leave the tent, Sirius grabbed Harry by the shoulder and said, "If you see any Dark spells coming in your direction, respond with full lethality."

Harry nodded in response and motioned for Fleur, who was carrying her sister, to lead that way, while he called his wand forth with a snap of his fingers, "I'll cover you. Hedwig go with Sirius."

She looked Harry in the eye and nodded, though she paused for a moment when she saw his hair shortened from shoulder length to less than two inches, becoming an untameable mess in the process. Shaking her, she set off at a brisk pace that was easily matched by Harry, who followed the incantations of any of two dozen spells ready to fly from his lips. Isis was draped over his shoulders, while Leon and Cheshire strode on either side of Harry, Leon easily twice the size of any normal wolf walking the earth, and Cheshire matching him for size.

They eventually reached a clearing in the forest, where the sounds of the chaos of whatever was happening was dimmed. Fleur, Gabrielle having fallen back asleep in her arms as they were fleeing, set her sister down, laying against a tree. She then drew her own wand and glanced around the clearing.

She then turned to Harry and spoke, {You never said you were a metamorphmagus...}

He grinned sadly and said, {It is something that I have quite a bit of confusion about.}

She looked thoughtful for a moment and then nodded before replying, {That makes sense... I suppose you have a few questions about why my family reacted so badly to the Bulgarian mascots?}

Harry gave a sad little half smirk, and said, {Only if you are comfortable with me asking.}

She blinked in surprise at that and said, {Probably easier to explain first and then have you ask whatever questions you may have...}

{Again, only if you want to. Unlike a friend of mine, I don't have a pathological need for answers.}

She sighed, but smiled brightly, saying, {Then I think I should tell you that I am not what most would consider entirely human. I am, like those... harlots... who paraded themselves around under the guise of being a mascot, a Veela.}

She closed her eyes, apparently gathering her thoughts and continued. {Veela are a race that were effected by the magics of nymphs, similar to dryads and naiads, except where they were of trees and fresh water, Veela are of air and fire.}

She took a breath, before moving on, {And the magic of this race breeds true in the female branches of the family. If a Veela has a son, that child's daughters are far more likely than not to be Veela. There are no 'part-Veela' as is so often used as a reference to how many generations removed from a Veela mother a female child is. It is only a matter of how strong the Veela magic is in the person in question.}

She sighed and finish, {So, now you know. Any questions.}

Harry shook his head, and stared off into the trees, before saying, {Thank you for sharing, it cleared up a few thinks that puzzling me... So I might as well share something of my own... The reason why my talent as a metamorphmagus confuses me so much is that it is so strong that it makes me wonder if I am entirely human anymore.}

He switched his wand into his left hand, and held up his right. Fleur watched as the flesh and bone of the extremity shifted and changed before it resembled a hairless version of the claw one might see on a Werewolf at the full moon.

She just stared Harry in the eye as he grimaced and forced his hand back to normal. They remained silent for sometime, before a there was a flash of green light in the sky, and a skull with a snake coming from it's mouth floated high in the sky.

Harry just looked at it for a few minutes before saying, {The Dark Mark flies once more... And from here it looks to be right next to Mars, which seems unnaturally bright tonight... Nothing good will come of this.}

Hedwig flashed into the clearing fifteen minutes later, telling Harry and Fleur to return to the tent. By the time they had gotten back, everything was packed up, and the two who were without apparation licenses, or the skill itself, were brought side-along back to the Manor.

The Delacour family stayed at the Marauder's Manor for two more days before they returned home to France.

Jean-Paul bid Harry goodbye with a strong handshake (and a few more whispered combat tips), while Gabrielle decided that deserved some strange combination of a flying tackle and a hug. Fleur gave him a kiss on the cheek and a warm hug, the latter of which he returned, while she said, {I'll plan for the worst, and if it does not occur, I expect you to cheer for me to win the Tri-Wizard.}

{And when I am forced to compete?}

{I'll do everything in my power to give you a run for your money Harry.}

A/N2: I got really, really stuck on what to write for the birthday party. So if it sucks, it is because I had to really force it. And looky, not your standard Goblet of Fire. And Ivan has returned!

I also took a guess at when the dream occurred. My reasoning is, the Cup occurs on Monday the 22nd, the Weasleys pick Harry up the day before on Sunday, and he gets his letter on Saturday

morning soon after having written the letter to Sirius, meaning it (the dream) takes place late Friday, early Saturday.

For those of you wondering just how many familiars Harry is going to have, I will say that it is a magic number, and our poor hero is not going to like it.

The sheer amount of Harry/Draco out there is deeply disturbing, I have trouble even sifting through the stories out there without a second character filter active.

I think part of the reason updates have started getting so far apart is the lack of Harry Potter fanfiction that I have been reading. My profile now has every story I have enjoyed reading favorited, so if you have read something, enjoyed it, and don't see it there, send it in with your review. Or just send the title of a good story with your review and don't check the list. Either one is good. And not Harry/Draco or Harry/any-guy-what-so-ever. The first is just plain wrong in my mind (I despise the little ferret) and the second is just not my cup of tea.

So apparently jbern has finished his latest work (I couldn't read it, second person is so hard to follow) and will be (eventually) beginning work on the sequel to "The Lie I've Lived". As a corollary to the fact I've finally populated my favorites list, I'll say that I found most of the Harry Potter stuff there from first find fic recommendations at and then just reading through the favorites of the authors of the stories I liked. I wonder how many other people do that? Could be poll worthy... I could also one day actually put something into the area where I write whatever it is I am supposed to write... something... meh.

A Happy (belated) Turkey Day. Gobble gobble.

A/N: As always, my thanks goes out to those who are kind enough to review. Thank you.

The Sorting Hat's song from this chapter is taken directly from Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, pages 176 and 177 specifically. (And as a gentle reminder, I do not own Harry Potter.)

Rant for this week: Mpreg. Verdict: You sorry sods who write and read it, fail at understanding the basic concepts of human reproduction FOREVER. Personally I don't know whether to blame Arnold Schwarzenegger and the movie 'Junior' or Rabid Yaoi Fangirls... I wonder how many of the writers of Mpreg fanfics have even seen 'Junior'?

Anywho, on with the show.

Chapter 37: The Tri-Wizard Tournament

Late into the night of August thirty-first/early into the morning of September first, Harry paced back and forth in one of his rooms, mentally going over his packed bags. He was doing this because, while he rarely lacked for things to do, most of his belongings were stored away. It hadn't helped matters (that pertained to his boredom) that since he had started working with his aspects, and taking the concept further, the amount of sleep he needed had dropped beneath had dropped to under an hour and a quarter.

Back to packing, Harry grinned at how much he was able to bring with him. Everyone with half a brain knew that, for the most part, you could not store an expanded space within an expanded space. There were exceptions for everything, but the amount of work required made Harry loath to put the effort forth... For one simple reason: Space expanded trucks can be shrunk at a ratio of thirty-six to one without any ill effects.

Granted there were a few materials (consisting mostly of a plant and animal products) that did not travel well... and most British wizards were happy to remain ignorant of the fact that muggles could ship anything around the world.

Idiots.

'Multi-compartment, space expanded trunk with school and linking books, journals, clothing both mundane and magical, and sundry supplies. Check. Multitude of shrunken space expanded trunks stored in a perfectly normal box the size of a The Lord of the Rings omnibus, containing my ever-growing collection of... stuff. Check. Sanity... Haven't seen it for more than a decade.'

He laughed ruefully at that, wondering at how he had so easily accepted being a broken shadow of a human being. Granted it wasn't so bad that he couldn't enjoy life, but he sometimes (albeit rarely) mourned the fact that he could never be normal...

He took a seat in one of the more comfortable chairs in his room, and dropped himself into the fortress that was his mind.

A few days ago, he had... moved... what he considered the absolute center of his mind. Now instead of a library (which was connected with this area by a spiral staircase, both of which he had started to booby-trap), he was now somewhere that was a cross of a throne room and council chamber. It was a circular room with lecterns lining the gray stone walls, the books on the lecterns having titles such as 'Transfiguration', 'Physics', and 'Psychology', to name a few. A few feet away from the walls were three seats which could more accurately be defined as thrones. One was a rather plain seat of a dark stone, another looked to be made of animal bones and furs, and the last was an ethereal construct of fumes and vapor.

The latter two thrones were occupied. Upon the Bone Throne sat the Harry who had been imbued with his instinctual self, who had for the sake of ease of reference Harry had named Beast, and he had also been made into a repository for his knowledge of human and animal biology (both magical and mundane) alongside everything he knew about both the Animagus transformation and his Metamorphmagus abilities. He was no longer dress identically to Harry Prime, instead he wore a pair of forest camouflage cargo pants, a black shirt, and a red dragon leather trenchcoat with matching boots, while abstaining from the glasses Harry usually wore. He was sitting with his back against one armrest of the throne with his legs over the other, reading a book. Why the that book was the Magical Creatures and Beings allbook (that being the name he had come up with for the tomes that served as one of the primary containers for all his knowledge as divided into different areas of study) was a bit odd, but Harry shrugged it off. The manifestation of Harry's subconscious

(who had been filled with all of Harry's knowledge of the Mind Arts, psychology, and history, while being named Morpheus) sat upon the Ethereal Throne, he was dressed in a set of soft looking silver robes and had ditched the glasses like Beast, and was playing with a Rubik's Cube.

The Alchemy allbook flew from its lectern and into Harry's hand as he set himself down onto the third throne, which had changed itself into a comfy looking recliner moments before his backside hit it. He idly flipped a few pages as he immersed himself into the knowledge the tome contained.

After a few moments, he said, "So, Beast, do we go back to the meditative exercises to find out what our Animagus form is, or do we go to the next step and start brewing one of the potions that gives the vision of it?"

Beast and Morpheus shared a silent conversation for a few minutes while Harry kept flipping through the Alchemy book, until Morpheus broke the silence by saying, "We feel that using one of the mid-strength hallucinogenic form revealing potions would be the most efficient."

Beast went on to explain, "What most of the meditation methods do is get you conscious mind to discover one's form is to use the subconscious as a lens for one's instincts, and all the two of us can agree on is that it is a dragon of some kind. The particular series of potions we're thinking of using have very few risks, are reasonably easy to brew, and any one of them could be ready before the end of the calender year."

"I'll need to figure out which one to make... Do you think we should create an aspect for potions knowledge?"

Morpheus's forehead furrowed in concentration, and he looked at Beast who had a wiseass grin on his face, and said, "Potions should be last. It would be best paired with chemistry, alchemy, and the more... energetic uses of physics, and I want more of us in here before we give our inner pyro a body."

Beast cackled and said, "I say, with the Tri-Wizard on the horizon, we manifest our inner badass. We give him all our combat magics, defensive and offensive ranging from the nuisance crap like the

tickling charm to our lethal very lethal high power piercers. Then we load him with what we know of martial arts, weapons combat, and tactics."

Harry nodded, and went back to his 'reading'.

Sometime later (time being extremely relative in a mindscape), Harry grunted in anger and tossed the book away, which dissolved in midair to reappear on its lectern. He growled in frustration while running a hand through his hair.

"Why do I insist on torturing myself like this? Alchemists far more proficient than I have spent their lives trying to make a Stone, and here I am banging my head against the proverbial wall trying to save two people who have accepted their deaths..."

Morpheus snorted and said, "Well there wouldn't be this issue if Dumbles had used the real bait in his trap, or only gave the illusion of a baited trap..."

Beast growled while speaking, "I'm just glad that after Grindelwald was brought down the Yanks ignored the old man and executed his Lieutenants, otherwise there would be more reasons we could not deal with him."

Harry cursed under his breath, but then said, "I agree with you. I would be worried if the only think keeping a group of Dark Lords in their spheres of influence was a meddlesome old man with a god complex."

Morpheus sighed, and tried to put everything in perspective, "Could be worse, Dumbledore could actually be acting with malicious intent instead of being extremely misguided."

At breakfast before leaving for platform 9 and $\frac{3}{4}$, Harry voiced a concern that had been rattling around in his head since he had heard that Hogwarts was undergoing renovations for the upcoming event.

"Padfoot, Moony, with whatever is has or is going to happen to the castle, what is going to happen with the Marauder's Map?"

Sirius's face scrunched up in thought and then he said, "I have a few vague notions, but Remus was the one who did the bulk of the work on the map..."

Lupin nodded, and said, "The very last version of the Map was made to take readings from the wards of Hogwarts. Everything it did, it got the raw information from my map of the wards."

"Doesn't that mean you had get access to the central wardstone?"

"Yes, but if you are a student, and you look hard enough, it is not that hard to find or gain access to. I had already mapped the majority of the wards, with few dozen feet of notes that made next to no sense. I already knew where the rest of the wardstones were. Just getting some readings off of it let me finish my wardmap. But, I digress, the Map, if it is one of the four copies of the final version, it should be self updating."

"Okay, but how can I tell whether or not it is a final version?"

"What level of commands have you been using?"

Harry sat there in puzzled silence.

"You have been using some of the commands, haven't you?"

The-Boy-Who-Was-Confused nodded.

Remus closed his eyes for a minute, obviously thinking, and then said, "Tell me how you got your hands on the Map you use..."

As Harry told the tale of how he had first started sharing the map with Fred and George, Sirius let off a quick, surreptitious summoning charm. As Harry finished his story, a bit of parchment came zooming into the room. Sirius snatched it out of the air and tossed it at his godson as Remus explained how to query a Map for its version.

Sirius then finished, "Though I am fairly certain that we made sure to destroy all the previous versions, so there may not be any of the old ones hanging about, but just in case, the is my copy of the final Map. That way, if the one you do have is a final, you don't have to share anymore."

As always, Harry had arrived at the platform about an hour early, and claimed the last compartment in the last car. He had been killing time by running theories and calculations on how to make bigger booms. Leo and Cheshire were the size of smallish house cats, Isis was draped around Harry's neck, and Hedwig was perched up in the luggage rack.

Eventually Hermione eventually walked in as Harry muttered to himself, "Bloody hell."

She responded, almost automatically, "Harry, language!"

He muttered a quick apology combined with a greeting, and started murmuring under his breath, flipping through the pages of the journal he had been making notes in. Hermione eyed him before taking a seat and pulling out a thick book, and began reading. Fifteen minutes later, Neville came in, greeted his two friends, and pulled out a Herbology magazine of his own to read.

A few minutes before the train was to leave, the twins popped in and said their hellos before they went off to do what ever it was they did on the train. No one who knew them ever really wanted to know, but Harry had always assumed that they pranked all of the prefects and the Head Boy and Girl. But that was just his guess.

A half an hour into the train ride, Harry started cursing in Russian. He grabbed his wand and conjured a steel bucket at his feet. Having drawn the attention of Hermione and Neville, they watched as he started ripping pages from the journal he was reading, tossing the papers into the bucket.

Hermione, having never seen Harry destroy his notes, asked, "What are you doing?"

"Too big of a boom. Taking it to the grave with me."

Hermione blinked several times while Neville said, "Blasphemy! There is no such thing as too big of a boom."

Hermione rolled her eyes at Neville, before she said, "Harry, I've never seen you actually destroy your notes..."

"Doesn't mean I haven't. I've had a few rune arrays that I have obliterated from my notes. At one point as I was trying to make something to store large amounts of light and heat, I saw a line of reasoning that brought me to an array that would, if my theory was correct, drain the life force of anyone who walks over or under it. And that is just one example. I occasionally scare myself, and my answer to doing that is usually to lock away what scared me in some of the deeper corners of my mind. I've occasionally considered destroying the memories."

Hermione frowned and replied, "If some of them scare you that badly, why don't you?"

"Because of a man who styles himself 'Lord Flight-from-Death'."

A puzzled look crosses Hermione's face, and one of outright confusion was on Neville's.

Harry sighed and palmed his forehead, "A Dark Lord who most of Magical Britain refuses to speak the name of."

Both of them had the most amusing looks of realization on their faces that Harry was hard pressed to bite back a laugh.

"Any way, how was the rest of your summers? Letters are nice, but somethings can only be conveyed face to face."

They about what they had done for the summer, with Harry's part of the conversation revolved around the house guests and the World Cup, with an explanation of how Cheshire had reared his head and then said next to nothing.

Eventually Neville asked, a clear attempt at a joke, "But I have been wondering just what life threatening situation is going to be set loose in the school."

But it did not have the humorous effect he was looking for, because instead, Harry paled and stilled.

Neville, cursed under his breath (in English, to which Hermione responded "Neville, language!"), and said, "What do you know Harry?"

"Ever heard of the Tri-Wizard Tournament?"

Dumbledore paced in his office, waiting for the Express to arrive. He had worked hard at getting the Tri-Wizard re-instated. He had managed to get some of his ideas for tasks put in. With Voldemort rearing his head again, international cooperation was vitally important, and hopefully this would be a wonderful beginning.

As for the perpetual issue of the D.A.D.A. post, he had managed to get Alastor Moody to promise to curb his more manic traits, and Minerva and the portraits of the Founders had accepted the man to the position.

There was of course the ever present issue that Harry had long been out of his influence. There was little he could do to remedy this, but what he saw of the boy warmed his old heart. Maybe he would do what was needed without what the old man had believed were necessary manipulations. Even harmed as he was by his... relations... He still had a heart of gold.

He believed it was such a pity that such a bright young life would have to end for Tom to be destroyed

Severus Snape paced about his dungeon office, deep in thought. Ever since four years ago when his teaching methods (he conceded the point by now that calling his prior methods 'teaching' was generous at best and would be considered an outright lie by any normal person) were forcibly altered, that the dunderheads who attended his classes were not quite as stupid as he thought they were. Considering that he had deviated greatly from how he had learned potions under Horace Slughorn, he was actually surprised there weren't more explosions in the potions lab.

So, after four years of a student body that actually improved their potion-making abilities, Snape had to admit (if only to himself) if given the choice he would continue teaching the way he had been forced to.

But that was only part of what was causing him to pace. He was thinking most on... he was not entirely sure on how to address the boy. If he called him Potter that reminded him of exactly who his father was, but aside from formerly looking like the man in miniature, the boy had little in common with the man that Severus despised the

memory of. The only subject that he had been any good at was Transfiguration, which the boy admittedly had a talent at.

Everything else about him reminded him of Lily. From the way he held himself, to how good he was at his studies. Then there was the issue that he had his mother's eyes, and the fact that he used his metamorphmagus abilities to look less like his father and more like his mother.

Of course there was the... issue of the pranks he had pulled on the school. None of them were truly malicious as some of the things his father and his cronies did were, and he never singled out any one person (though he had at times focused on his Slytherins, but he had to admit that no matter what he had done as the Head of House the more visible members of his once great House continued to act like gits rather than proper witches and wizards, and so while not excusable the boy's predisposition to pranking his Snakes en masse once or twice a year was understandable).

More over, he had to admit that the theme song that the boy had jokingly given him was quite nice.

So as Snape left his office to get to the feast, he hummed a few bars of 'The Imperial March'.

Harry sat at the Gryffindor table, in between his two best friends, idly twiddling his thumbs waiting for the feast to get started. As they had taken the carriages up to the castle, through a storm that made him glad that this wasn't his first year, he hadn't noticed any differences on the exterior, and as the Entrance and Great Halls were one after the other upon entering the castle, Harry had yet to notice any changes at all in the school. Hermione and Neville had agreed with his belief that somehow, somehow, his name was going to be chosen as one of the champions, and that it would probably be easier on his tentative hold of his sanity if he just resigned himself to the fact.

He watched as McGonagall led the new first years into the hall, and set Alistair onto his stool. One of the first years bore a resemblance to an annoyance a year younger than him. Creevey. Bigger all. There was another Creevey in the school... Hopefully Colin could keep his relative (a brother most likely, though also possibly a cousin) out of Harry's hair unless he needed help with his class work... which if things went as pear-shaped as Harry thought they

would this year, his helping of the years below him would be less frequent. Which was mildly upsetting, he enjoyed working with the wee ones. His lips twitched into a semi-grin as the first years had various awed looks as the hat started to sing.

A thousand years or more ago
when I was newly sewn,
there lived four wizards of renown,
whose names are still well known:
bold Gryffindor, from wild moor,
fair Ravenclaw, from glen,
sweet Hufflepuff, from valley broad,
shrewd Slytherin, from fen.
They shared a wish, a hope, a dream,
they hatched a daring plan
to educate young sorcerers
thus Hogwarts School began.
Now each of these four founders
formed their own house, for each
did value different virtues
in the ones they had to teach.
By Gryffindor, the bravest were
Prized far beyond the rest;
For Ravenclaw, the cleverest
would always be the best;
For Hufflepuff, hard workers were
Most worthy of admission;
And power-hungry Slytherin
loved those of great ambition.
While still alive they did divide
Their favorites from the throng,
Yet how to pick the worthy ones
When they were dead and gone?

'Twas Gryffindor who found the way,
He whipped me off his head
The founders put some brains in me
So I could choose instead!
Now slip me snug about your ears,
I've never yet been wrong,
I'll have a look inside your mind
And tell where you belong!

Harry applauded along with the rest of the school as the song ended and, as per usual, made sure to commit the names and faces of those being sorted to memory. Part of him just found it highly amusing when people were so surprised that he could greet anyone in the castle his year or younger by name.

Which, now that he thought about it, as a fourth year, that represented over half of the student body. Now that was something of an accomplishment. Harry idly watched as the last of the new students was sorted, and Dumbledore began the feast in his usual unusual form ("Tuck in." Harry shook his head, couldn't the man decide whether or not that he was sane?) and conversation started all around the hall. Harry picked at his food, as per usual

Hermione was chatting with her one dorm-mate that she actually saw eye to eye with (she called Parvati and Lavender gigglish and condemned their interest in Divination even though it was no longer on the Hogwarts curriculum) Sally-Anne Perks. Neville was chatting with the other two fourth year Gryffindor boys, Seamus and Dean.

There was no one new up at the Staff table, so Harry couldn't help but wonder who was going to teach the D.A.D.A class. He was really starting to wonder whether or not that particular job was cursed or not.

Of course, this all went south when Hermione had heard that Hogwarts kept house-elves. Harry wondered how much detention he would get if he sent Nearly-Headless Nick onto the afterlife. After five minutes of ranting, in addition to (however infrequent) comments about the Manor having elves, Harry had had enough.

"Hermione, do you know what happens to house-elves when they are not bound to a family?"

"Yes, they are free to do what ever they wish with their lives."

"Wrong. They slowly go insane and then die."

She just stared at him for a minute as though, and then said, "Well that is just what people who enslave..."

Harry grunted, pulled his wand, and put up privacy spells encompassing the two of them "Hermione. Not only is it well

documented, but I know first hand from my Mage Sense that house-elves produce no magic of their own. They draw if from the home they live in and the family they serve."

Hermione's eyes watered as she was told this. She knew that slavery was wrong... but this was a choice between freedom and death or servitude and life.

Harry sighed and said, "You have to understand Hermione, part of the adaptations house-elves have made is that when they are obeying orders their magic rewards them with feelings of pleasure. There is also the fact that it is only among traditionally Dark families that house-elves are even mistreated. In most other cases they are treated as either how well to do mundanes would treat the help or, in the best case, as a member of the family."

Hermione looked down at the table in a combination of consternation and shame. "I just wanted to help..."

"I know Hermione. Quite frankly there should be some safeguards in place to protect him. We got Dobby when Sirius pauperized the Malfoys and he was in terrible shape. Don't think I don't know how bad they can have it. Hell, comparing notes with Dobby, I don't know who had the worst decade from '81 to '91, me or him."

Finally most of the school had stuffed itself to bursting, and the Headmaster stood to make his beginning of the year speech, which included the usual notice about Filch's ever-expanding list of banned items (Harry had actually read it once in second year out of boredom, and had wondered what rubber duckies had ever done to the man), and then went on to make an announcement that upset a good deal of the student population.

"Unfortunately, the Inter-House Quidditch Cup will not be taking place this year."

This statement caused a general uproar among school population, many of whom were quite fond of their Quidditch. Dumbledore however ignored this and pressed on.

"This is due to an event that will be taking up a great deal of the faculty's time and energy. It is with that said, I am pleased to announce..."

The old man didn't quite manage to finish his announcement as at this point the doors to the Entrance Hall were flung open and a man leaning on a traveling staff, covered by black traveling cloak made his way into the Great Hall. Every other step he made was accompanied by a loud thunk that Harry attributed to a prosthetic leg of some kind, a peg leg if the wizarding world reverted to form. As he drew back the hood of his cloak, it was seen that his face was a patchwork of scars, with a large chunk of his nose missing. One of his eyes was whirling around, and Harry recognized it as one of the more expensive magical replacements for a lost eye, while the man's hair was grizzled and dark.

Dumbledore soon recovered from the interruption and said, "Ah, I would like to introduce all of you to your new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, Alastor Moody."

The Hall dissolved into chattering whispers as everyone discussed the fact that one of the more famous (and paranoid) Aurors of the War was teaching at Hogwarts. After a minute or two, the Headmaster brought things back on track.

"As I was saying. It is my pleasure to announce that the Tri-Wizard Tournament will be taking place at Hogwarts this year. For those of you who are not aware of the history involved in this event, I will give a short explanation, for those that do, please allow your attention to wander.

"The Tournament was first established about seven hundred years ago as a means of promoting friendly competition between the top three European schools of magic. A champion is selected to represent each of the school, and the champions then compete in a number of tasks. Traditionally there are three, but those running the event this time believe that with its attempted reintroduction a larger spectacle should be made, and the tasks have been upped from three to seven. The Tournament was initially discontinued due to a rising death toll, and attempts have been made over the centuries to bring it back, and out Ministry's departments of International Cooperation and Games and Sports believe the time is ripe for another try.

"Those involved have done their best to assure that none of the champions will find themselves in mortal danger, and further more,

to insure that each of the champions are well equipped to deal with any danger there may be, no one who is under age, that is to say younger than seventeen, may submit themselves for consideration as champion.

"Both Beauxbatons and Durmstrang will be arriving with the majority of their student bodies next Saturday, when names will then begin to be taken from those who wish to participate. Hogwarts has just undergone its once a century maintenance, and the East and West wings have been enlarged to ensure that they will be able to sufficiently accommodate our guests. I ask that the student body treats our foreign guests with proper courtesy and for Hogwarts to support our champion when he or she is selected. Now, it is time for all of us to get some sleep, so off you go to your warm beds."

The weekend was longer than normal (and Harry took the chance to get started on the potion he wanted done by Christmas), due to the first being on a Thursday, and then it was Monday and Gryffindor (or at least those that had taken Care of Magical Creatures as an elective, spent the morning outdoors. First Herbology, where they squeezed bubotubers for pus, and learned that someone had tried to curse her pimples off. Harry shook his head. Nothing is ever solved by firing spells at point blank range at your own face. It was perfectly alright way for dealing with enemies, but pimples? He shuddered at the lack of thought involved in pulling something like that.

Then they were introduced to Hagrid's newest pets at Care of Magical Creatures, the Blast-Ended Skrewts. Harry kept quiet about his concerns that someone had broken a number of international magical animal cross breeding laws when these... things were brought into existence. And he sure as hell didn't mention that he thought Professor Grubbly-Plank had lost her mind by allowing Hagrid a chance to teach the class. They were ugly, their magics convoluted and muddled, and ill-tempered. Harry paled as Hagrid made an off hand comment about making the raising of these abominations a year long project. Hermione defended Hagrid's choice in creatures, referencing how useful dragon blood is, but how few would want to own one as a pet, to study when Draco bad mouthed the Skrewts.

As the Gryffindors made their way back inside for lunch, and Hermione huffed at Neville when he commented on her defending

the little beasts, and commented that it would be better to kill all of the Skrewts now before Hagrid figured out what made them thrive. Harry was already planning his first deliberate rule breaking of the year, long before Hermione had made her comment. Tonight after curfew he was sneaking out here and killing every last single Blast-Ended Skrewt he could set his wand on. Hopefully his Runes class this afternoon would make up for this dismal Care of Magical Creatures.

As Harry and his friends queued up to get into the Great Hall for dinner, they saw Malfoy and Ronald having some sort of argument. It wasn't too surprising, after all it was a week that started on an odd numbered day.

But what was surprising was that when Ronald stalked off in his usual angry huff, and Malfoy aimed his standard nuisance of a spell at the Weasley's retreating back, there was a yell of, "Oh no, you don't laddie!", followed by an extremely loud bang. And as Moody came limping into view, Harry saw that there was a pure white ferret where Malfoy was standing.

He had no clue what happened in the next five minutes, as he was far too busy laughing himself hoarse from the fact that someone besides himself thought that Malfoy would make a pretty decent ferret.

Of course the next day, when Hagrid sent him a tear stained letter mourning the fate of his precious new pets, all of which had been horrifically killed during the night, the half-giant asked Harry and his friends down for tea so that he could have someone to speak to. Of course Harry went to see the man when he had some free time, even if he was the one that murdered his beloved pets. He had known how Hagrid would react, and had figured that as one of Hagrid's favorite people at the castle, that he would seek out Harry. Besides, he knew he would feel a little sorry about how Hagrid would feel about losing some of his pets, even if Harry felt no guilt what-so-ever about exterminating the beasts.

Of course, the easiest way to distract Hagrid from anything is to show the man something rare and deadly, which is why, after a half an hour of listening to Hagrid wail about how the Skrewts were 'far too young to go', he hauled Cheshire in from outside the hut, and left the smart aleck lion to be cooed over by the half-giant.

As Cheshire gave his wizard a dirty looks as Harry walked out of the hut, and surprisingly said something...

I am going to get you for this Harry...

Would you settle for a swordfish?

Do you bribe all of you familiars to do what you want them to do?

Yup.

The next day or two after that passed without incident, except there was a general consensus among the population of the castle that there was an improvement in the quality of Snape's teaching (This was generally left unsaid by the Gryffindors, though Hermione did mention it in passing to Harry that she had talked about it with a few of the girls she was friendly with in Ravenclaw. Harry had had a chat with a few of the Hufflepuffs he spent time with about it).

But then came the class that everyone who had already taken raved about, and those that had heard even one story about the legendary Master Auror waited for.

Defense Against the Dark Arts.

As everyone chattered, waiting for the man of the hour to show up, Harry thought back to what his magical senses told him about the man. All of nothing, at least directly. He had layered himself in so much protective and concealing magic that nothing about him could be felt, and with out the glasses that blocked his Mage Sight, the air around the man made it difficult to see him.

And what that told him is that Mad-Eye Moody was paranoid to the point of insanity, which was to be expected. Aurors don't have careers in the field that last until forced retirement, unless they are have a good deal of power, a great deal of skill, and enough paranoia to make conspiracy theorists jealous.

And then he slumped into the room, his eye whirling about.

"Put those books away, you won't need them today. I've a letter from Professor Black, who has relayed to me what he and your previous

teachers have taught you. I've notice that you are dangerously behind on curses. I intend to rectify that in the year I will be teaching."

Neville interrupted with, "You're not staying?"

The old man turned to face Neville, and his face twisted into something that on any other person would be a smile, and said, "You're Frank and Alice's kid, aren't you?" Neville nodded, and Moody continued, "No laddie. I've come out of retirement for just one year, as a favor to an old friend. Then I am going back to the peace and quiet."

He turned back to the class and asked, "Now, the Ministry says I am supposed to just teach you the counters for the most commonly used Dark curses and leave it at that. They think you all are too fragile to see the curses themselves until you are NEWTs level. But it is my firm believe that you need to know exactly what you are up against in order to combat it. So, that being said, what are the most heavily punished curses in Wizarding Britain?"

Hermione of course was the first hand up, though there were a few others. Moody eventually called on Dean.

"Um... there are always complaints from my mum about how some many Death Eaters got off by claiming the Imperius."

"Correct laddie. The Imperius curse gave the Ministry a lot of problems during the war, and even more after it."

At this, he pulled a jar with three spiders inside it out from within his desk, and pulled one out. He held it in the palm of his hand so that the class could see it, before he muttered, "Imperio!"

He then made the spider do a minute of two of acrobatics before it broke into a tap dance. The entire classroom broke into laughter, all save Moody and Harry.

"You lot think that this is hilarious? How about I do that to you?"

The laughter died as quickly as it had begun.

"I could make this spider do anything I wanted it to do. Total control over the target is what this curse gives its caster. And Mr. Finnigan's mum is correct in that a lot of suspected Death Eaters claimed Imperius to get out of time in Azkaban. But it can be fought, though it takes real strength of character and will. Best just to get out of the way. CONSTANT VIGILANCE! Now, anyone else know one?"

This time Neville was among those who raised their hands, Hermione's hand being up was a given however. Now Neville was not as shy and withdrawn as he might have been, but right now he was rather pale as he waited to see who Moody would call upon.

"Longbottom?"

"The Cruciatus Curse."

Moody simply nodded, and fished the next spider out of the jar. He enlarged the spider before he softly incanted, "Crucio!"

The spider writhed in what was obviously a great deal of pain, as what looked like a small lightning bolt of orange energy connected it and Moody's wand, but Harry was too busy watching Neville who was gripping his desk with white knuckles...

Harry coughed and said, delicately, "I think we all understand why this curse is such bad news, sir."

Moody took a glance at Neville and ceased the curse. He returned the spider to its normal size before turning to address the class.

"Pain. You do not need any other implements to torture someone if you can cast this spell... Now there is one more spell that ranks up with the first two in terms of how badly it is punished. Anyone know what it is?"

The entirety of the class were paler than normal, wondering what would be as bad as the other two. Hermione was the only one to raise her hand this time and it was shaking this time, but not in excitement as is so often the case, but rather in fear. Harry took off his glasses and extended his senses to take in the entirety of the classroom, knowing what would come next.

"Yes, Miss Granger?"

"Avada Kedavra. The Killing Curse."

"Correct. The last, and by many considered the worst." Harry snorted at the mention of that.

The man dumped the last spider out onto the desk, and it immediately took off, like it somehow knew what was coming next. Moody leveled his wand, and rather than softly casting the spell as with the last two, he roared out, "Avada Kedavra!"

A blast of sickly green energy leaped from the ex-Auror's wand and closed the distance to the spider in frightening speed. When it hit, the spider just stopped, dying instantly.

Harry took in what the spell looked like, on both the mundane and magical levels, and how the magic of it felt. He pushed the thoughts of this happening to his parents down. He kept those memories locked away, though he idly noted that he didn't include any storage for memories relating to people in the new center of his mindscape, and reminded himself to fix that sooner rather than later.

Moody broke the oppressive silence by saying, "Neither nice nor pretty. There is no countercurse or a shield that is capable of blocking it. It needs a powerful bit of magic behind it, along with a great deal of hate, in order to cast it. I am willing to bet the lot of you could point your wands at me and try to cast the spell, and I wouldn't even get a nosebleed. Doesn't matter though, I am not trying to teach this spell to you. But you are probably asking why I am telling and showing you this if there isn't a countercurse or shield to learn? It is because I believe you need to know. You have to realize what the absolute worst is. **CONSTANT VIGILANCE!**

"Now, these three curses are collectively known as the Unforgivable Curses, and the use of anyone of them on a fellow human being is enough to net you a lifetime sentence in Azkaban. That is what you will have to fight, and that is what I'll teach you. But you must learn to practice constant, never-ending vigilance. Now get out your quills and paper and copy the following down..."

They finish the lesson by taking notes on each of the Unforgivables, but no one spoke until the bell rang. As the Lions left the class room, they broke into excited chatter, but Harry kept a close eye on Neville.

He was still a little pale, and Harry was just about to say something before Moody said, "Longbottom, I'd like a word with you in my office."

Harry raised a brow and sent his friend a questioning look, who shook his head and said, "I'll catch up with you at lunch Harry."

As the hallway emptied, and Harry took one of the more roundabout ways to the Great Hall, he held one of his hands out in front of him. It was shaking rather badly.

The days passed until Saturday came, and the impending arrival of Beauxbatons and Durmstrang. The entire population of the school had been ordered to be in the Entrance Hall by half past five so that they could all be out in front of the castle for when the other two schools would arrive at six.

After lunch, the Great Hall was sealed, and no one would be allowed in until the feast that evening with the other schools. Harry had to spend most of his day with his potion, it having been seven days and seven hours since he had started the brewing, and there were a series of crucial steps that took place at this juncture, so thankfully he didn't have to use any of the rather potent stasis charms to move the window he had to do the work on it.

Finished, and with potion set to stew for three months and three days, and a stirring rod that had been charmed to stir counter-clockwise seven times ever twelve hours, he went to go clean up.

Professor McGonagall had arranged the students on the steps leading up to the doors, with first years on the lowest steps, and the students getting older as the steps went higher. It also meant that you could generally see over the row in front of you.

Everyone was chatting, killing time waiting for the competing schools to arrive when one of the first years pointed to a speck in the sky and promptly screamed in terror, obviously losing her head completely, yelling, "Look, its a dragon!"

Dennis Creevey scoffed and said, "Don't be stupid, its a flying house."

As the object closed in, it became obvious that, though closer in his guess, Dennis was still quite wrong. In reality it was a trio of powder blue very large carriages being drawn by massive flying horses, that were golden in color.

Harry blinked several times before recognizing the breed as Abraxans, shortly before the train of carriages rolled to a stop a short ways from the students. The door was flung open, and a boy in pale blue robes hopped out. He reached under the carriage and drew a set of golden steps out from under the door. He stepped back respectfully as a woman, one of the largest that anyone present had ever, or would ever, see came out of the carriage.

The size of both the vehicle and the horses that carried it, made some sense to most of the students. Except for those who, like Harry, had made studies in space expansion and weight reduction. In Harry's own estimation, the carriages probably weighed only slightly more than they appeared to with out much alteration, and even then the weight could be further reduced during flight.

As the half-giantess stepped onto the ground, the boy went to the next carriage, lowered its steps, and opened the door. He then did the same for the last of the three carriages. The students of Beauxbatons filed out of their transportation, Dumbledore started to clap, which lead to a round of applause from the entire student body.

The woman stepped over to the Headmaster and held out her hand. The old man barely had to bend in order to kiss the back of it.

"Greetings Madame Maxime and welcome to Hogwarts."

"It is a pleasure Dumbly-dorr, I hope you are well..."

"I am in quite good form, thank you."

She gestured behind her, rather carelessly and said, "My students and staff..."

The majority of the Beauxbatons students had disembarked, and Harry thought that they were probably grateful that it was still September and not later in the year, as their robes were made out of fine silk, as were many of the robes that the accompanying staff were wearing.

But as Harry was about to turn his attention back to the school Heads, he felt a pulse of magic from the lake. He whipped his head to stare intently at the water, and those who knew him, and knew some of what he was capable of, turned their attention to the lake.

Harry was vaguely aware of the the Beauxbatons students, their staff, and Headmistress heading into the school. He soon hear a muffled rumbling, accompanied by the sound of suction. Eventually Lee Jordan yelled out, while pointing at the object of his exclamation, "The lake!"

They watched as a whirlpool formed out in the waters of the Black Lake, and eventually something was seen to begin rising from the watery depths. It was the first and tallest of four masts. When the ship was finally in full view, it became apparent that it was a rather large ship. As it reached as close to shore as it would likely get, a pair of gangplanks, almost impossibly long, extended from the ship to the shore. People began disembarking, and from this distance it looked like they were all built along the lines of Crabbe and Goyle, though as they drew closer, it became apparent that they were just wearing thick fur cloaks, that looked shaggy and matted. The man leading the procession had silver hair, and was wearing furs that matched his hair.

He greeted the Dumbledore in an unctuous fruity voice, "Ah, Dumbledore, my good fellow, how have you been?"

"Just smashing, Professor Karkaroff, and you?"

"Fantastic, just fantastic. Dear old Hogwarts," Karkaroff said as he smiled, though his teeth were yellow and the smile was only apparent around his mouth. "It is great to be here... Viktor come along now, let us get into the warmth... Viktor has a bit of a head cold..."

Karkaroff gestured for one of his students to come forward, and Harry saw someone he recognized, who was looking even more surly than when Harry had encountered him at the World Cup. Of course, he was dragging his brother forward by the scruff of his neck.

A few voices in the crowd muttered as they recognized the world class Seeker, Viktor Krum. And Harry heard a good many people wonder if they could get an autograph.

Dumbledore led the three schools into the Great Hall, throwing the large doors open with a gesture of his wand. The room was easily triple the size it had been during lunch, though the enchanted section of the ceiling was still the same size as always. There were thirteen tables in the room, one ran along the back of the hall, on a raised dais, with all of the seats facing into the room, obviously the Head table. The other twelve were scattered about.

Dumbledore turned around and faced the mass of students and said, "Sit where you will, we will not be dining by House or school, so do try to make friends..."

As the throng started to file into the Hall, a hand clapped Harry heavily on the shoulder, and a voice, with a moderately thick Bulgarian accent said, "Ah, Harry. I knew I smelled you around here somewhere. I have some friends I want to introduce you to..."

Harry then interrupted Ivan by saying, while he turned around, "You mean you have some bets to win?"

"Yes that too. But they deserve it for not believing me."

Five minutes later, and about twenty galleons for Ivan, the pair found themselves sitting at a table near a few Hufflepuffs, a handful of Ivan's friends, and a few Lions. Harry felt someone... familiar... nearby with his Sense. Shaking his head, without he turning around, said to a familiar looking head of blond hair, "Good evening Fleur."

She jumped, ever so slightly, let out a rather quiet, "Eep!" and turned around to see Harry's back was still to her.

"You know, it is really disturbing to do something like that!"

"But it is so fun, and considering those books that, before I sued the author into a goblin execution, were out there, it is what many people would assume The-Boy-Who-Lived would be capable of."

"I believe you have mentioned how much you dislike those expectations..."

"True, but my father was a prankster, so I get their hopes up... And then I act like the atypical person that I am. It is so very amusing to see the looks on their faces."

"You are quite incorrigible, Harry..."

The meal that followed was louder than usual, and there were foods from France and the countries that Durmstrang represented. Harry watched with amusement as Fleur's allure sent many of the males with twenty feet of her into a dazed state. He also saw a few representatives from the Ministry at the Head table, not the least of all, the Minister of Magic himself, Cornelius Fudge.

Eventually the meal was brought to a close, and Dumbledore stood forth, and began to speak.

"The time has come. The Tri-Wizard Tournament is about to begin. Before we bring in the casket," there were a few muttered wonderings at the use of this particular word, "I would like to take a moment to make a few explanations about the procedures that the Tournament will be following this year. Though I think a few introductions are in order. For you who do not know them, these two gentlemen are Mr. Bartemius Crouch, Head of the Department of International Magical Cooperation," there were a few applause with this introduction, "and Mr. Ludo Bagman, Head of the Department of Magical Games and Sports." The applause for the former Beater were much louder than those for Crouch.

"Mr Bagman and Mr. Crouch have worked many late nights with their counterparts in the other Ministries involved to organize this Tournament. And one them will be joining myself, Madame Maxime, Professor Karkaroff on the judges' panel for the Tournament as a representative from the British Ministry. There will also be representatives from the German and French Ministries on the panel. Without further ado, Mr. Filch, the casket if you please."

There were mutterings as the caretaker carried in a large wooden chest adorned with jewels. Whispers flooded the hall as a few of the shorter students stood on their chairs to get a better look. Harry felt the bottom of his stomach drop into the floor when the casket entered into the room. He hated being right.

"The details for each task have already been overlooked by those who have worked so make this Tournament a reality, and the necessary arrangements for each as already been made for each of the seven tasks. There shall be one champion from each school, they shall be given scores according to how well they perform on each task. And the champion with the highest total by the end of the competition shall be the winner. And the champions shall be chosen by our impartial selector: the Goblet of Fire."

With that said, Dumbledore tapped his wand on top of the casket three times. The lid opened slowly, which Dumbledore then lifted, pulling out a large, roughly hewn wooden goblet. It would have been a perfectly normal cup if it wasn't filled to the brim with blue-white fire.

"Those who wish to be champions only need to place their name and school onto a slip of parchment and place it into the Goblet, which will be placed in Entrance Hall, then tomorrow after dinner this artifact shall determine just who the champions shall be. But to prevent those who are underage from entering themselves I shall draw an Age Line around the Goblet of Fire to prevent below the age of seventeen from crossing.

"Now be aware that entering your name into the Goblet of Fire constitutes a binding, magical contract (Harry snorted in disbelief that the fairly well documented (at least in certain circles) history of the object was being covered up) so you should be absolutely certain that you desire to compete.

"On a lighter note, I would like to say that three balls will be taking place this year, and all students fourth year or higher are automatically granted attendance, with those younger will require that they be asked to attend by an older student.

"Now I would like to bid you all good night. Durmstrang, the Head Boy shall show you where your quarters are located in the castle, Beauxbatons shall be shown the same by the Head Girl."

Harry stayed in his seat, staring in the direction of the Goblet of Fire, a sense of impending doom hanging over his head.

As the next day was Sunday, people would have tended to rise later in the day than normal, but by and large people were up bright and early. Mostly so that they could watch and see who would put their

name into the Goblet. Harry, who was normally the first student awake in the castle, had conjured himself a seat bright and early.

He had a clipboard with a list of names nearby, keeping track of all the Hogwarts students that had entered... and all those who had ran afoul of the Age Line. It seemed that whenever a person who wasn't old enough tried to cross it they simply were blocked. Later there were two pairs of students, the first set was a girl from Ravenclaw, and a boy from Hufflepuff. The second two were of course Fred and George Weasley. All four had apparently tried to use an aging potion to cheat the line. The result was that they did indeed get over the line, but were tossed back over it in short order.

Heavy a foot long white beard in the style of Dumbledore.

Harry had needed the laugh that had come from that. He had gotten bored of taking names down (usually their Housemates or Yearmates would congratulate them, so even if he didn't know the name before, he did after), he went out to the grounds and decided to take a nap by the lake.

Harry had taken to the air at about midday, his nerves and boredom starting to make him extremely twitchy. Eventually it was about an hour until the evening meal, so he went back to the tower to wash up.

Ten minutes before the feast was set to start, Fleur found Harry pacing restlessly in one of the corners of the Entrance Hall. {Harry, my friend, you need to calm down.}

{How can I be calm when that blasted magical object is sitting there like a ticking time bomb?}

{And why is this seeming to make you more of a basket-case than you said you were in your second year?}

{Because at least during the damn basilisk incident, I was doing something. I may not have been making any progress but I was still doing something! Here I am just alternately twiddling my thumbs and sitting on my hands!}

He had not stopped his pacing for a moment during the conversation, and Fleur now stood there, one foot tapping on the floor trying to

think of a way to distract a person she considered a friend, or at least something close to it.

{Ah, tell me Harry, what do you think of Mozart?}

Well he had once confessed that if he was incapable of using magic, he would not be able to make anything that would even loosely pass for art of any kind, be it picture in any medium, a sculpture, or music, he still enjoyed the arts. It took until the doors to the Great Hall were opened for the feast, but Fleur had managed to drag Harry into a conversation about classical composers.

Fleur was at least glad that the subject of distraction that she choose was a topic she enjoyed.

As they took a seat at one of the tables, they were shortly joined by Neville and Hermione, and then a little while later by Ivan, and surprisingly his brother. As everyone present was a little surprised by the fact that Harry and Fleur were talking animatedly in French about something (Hermione knew what, and the topic of the conversation was what surprised her) they did not notice that Cedric Diggory and a number of other sixth year Hufflepuffs had taken a seat.

For everyone who wasn't being distracted by a beautiful blonde, the meal seemed to drag on as the population of the Hall kept throwing glances at the Goblet that was sitting on a small plinth in front of where Dumbledore sat. Eventually the meal came to an end and many present grew quiet as he rose from his seat.

Fleur, noticing that the Hall had grown quiet said, {It is time, Harry.}

{Huh? What do you... Oh...} He looked around a little dazedly, before turning back to Fleur and saying, {Thank you so very much Fleur.}

{The conversation was quiet nice, even if it only started as a distraction...}

Harry, to keep himself at least moderately distracted, looked at who was sitting near him. Fleur was obvious and so were his friends from his own school. Of course then there was Ivan, but that his brother

had chosen to sit with them was odd. Then there was the Hufflepuffs and Cedric...

Harry grabbed his head in both hands as he felt a spike of pain at the base of his skull and vertigo overcame him. When the pain and spinning stopped, he was overlooking the Great Hall as it normally looked, though it seemed a little fuller than a normal school year. Then he saw the crimson robes of Durmstrang, the pale blue silk of Beauxbatons, and most importantly the Goblet of Fire. One by one four names were called out of the Goblet by Dumbledore, and then the whirling and pain came back.

Harry found himself back where he had begun, as Dumbledore made his way to the Goblet. Harry looked at the Hufflepuff team Seeker and asked, "When is your birthday, Cedric?"

"September seventh, why?"

"Just curious, just curious."

Dumbledore then cleared his throat quite audibly, and said to the Hall, "I believe that the Goblet of Fire is just about ready to render its decision. Those who are chosen, please go through the door behind and to the left of the Head table."

With that said, he swept his wand, and all the candles and lamps that lit the Hall dimmed until the chief source of illumination was the Goblet's blue-white flames, which moments later flared red. The cup then spit out a scrap of parchment that Dumbledore grabbed from midair.

"The champion for Durmstrang is Viktor Krum."

The students from that school, and a great many Quidditch fans from the other two, started cheer. Harry however started laughing, though it was not a good kind of laughter. It was intermixed with sobs, and there was a note of barely restrained madness in it. Those present who knew him looked at him with worry in their eyes.

The Goblet flared red again.

"The champion for Beauxbatons is Fleur Delacour."

The French Champion gave her friend a reassuring squeeze on the shoulder and went to the door where the Champions were to enter, as he schoolmates applauded her. Harry turned his attention to Dumbledore and the Goblet, as the latter flashed into red fire for a third time.

"And the champion for Hogwarts is Cedric Diggory!"

The population of the third and final school burst into applause.

"Now that all of the champions have been choose, I hope that all of you can support the your school's representative. By cheering your _ "

Dumbledore was cut off as the flames of the Goblet changed to red one last time. On reflex he caught the parchment that was launched from it. The entire Hall was silent as he simply stared at the piece of paper in front of him. He then said two words that Harry had hoped he wouldn't say.

"Harry Potter."

A/N2: This chapter took me forever to write, but I think it turned out okay. Merry belated Christmas (or whatever holiday you celebrate) and a early Happy New Year.

Cedric's canon age is seventeen as of Oct 31 1994, during which he is in his sixth year. I am going to say that he is indeed old enough, just for the sake of ease.

And, I said it once, I'll say it again, wading through the sheer volume of Harry/Draco when looking from stories through the central list is really disturbing. (And it seems to be a chief source of the Mpreg... If there weren't a goodly number of great stories on this site that I can actually stomach I'd be yelling 'kill the servers with fire'.)

A/N(OOPS): I forgot this upon the initial upload, but I have some acknowledgments I wish to make.

First a list of those that gave me suggestions of stories to read (If I missed your name I apologize):

rusty1874

OutlawKnight

jpotterNY

Airene

Blazer-Of-Heat

Grim (unsigned review)

Victoria Noble

Love wind

godzillahomer

Book-Smart-Fox

Quincy80

LordArchanon

Hedwig Edwiges

loot

IwishIknew (unsigned review) (by the way do you know just how many stories there are with the title 'Realizations'?)

And secondly I wish to give a very special thanks to the following person for a long, long string of reviews that point out my abuse of the english language (I promise I'll make use of the things you've pointed out... eventually):

alix33

A/N: As always, I give my heart felt thanks to every single reader that takes the time to review.

And anyone complaining about the cliffhanger last chapter, that is almost identically where a corresponding chapter in the book ends.

I have a feeling I am going to start having to exorcize plot bunnies. May have to put a 'story' of one shot/first chapters up soon. Head's getting a bit full.

Sorry it isn't longer, but the 10k word chapters are rather hard to get out...

Pre-Post A/N: Looking at my traffic I have had absolutely no hits since the 8th, and I've been managing at least 2,000 hits a day (give or take a few hundred) since... (eyes bug out when going back over traffic) I stopped posting every three days. I wonder if something is up...

Chapter 38: A Reactionary Beginning

"Bloody hell!"

"Harry! Language!"

Harry shot a glare at his best female friend, and decided that he really needed to start getting back at her for stopping his use of certain parts of the English language.

Harry shook his head as he stood up. Even expected as it was, the fact that his name had come out of the ancient tort – err – relic was still upsetting. As he got to the front of the Hall, he hopped up onto the dais and turned to face the assembled students, before he opened his mouth and executed plan A-1 or as he otherwise called it, 'cover my ass'.

"Ladies and gentlemen, let us get the following out of the way." He pulled his wand out and held it tip up and said, "I, Harry James Potter, hereby solemnly swear on my life and magic that I did not contribute, by word or deed, to my name coming out of the Goblet of Fire as a champion of the Tri-Wizard Tournament. So mote it be." The tip of his wand flashed to confirm the oath was in effect. He quickly threw off a spell that mimicked a magnesium flare to show

that along with being alive, he still had his magic. "Now with that taken care of, I want you all to know that anyone who spreads rumors about how I am a glory seeking prat will soon be in contact with my solicitors about a pending defamation lawsuit." He then stalked off through the door the other three champions had gone through.

As Harry slumped through the door, Fleur, showing a rare lack of elegance said, "Crap."

Harry grunted as he went to lean against one of the walls, and said, "That about sums it up Fleur. Cedric I want to apologize, though you will find out I just swore a magical oath in front of everyone in the castle besides you three that I had nothing to do with my name coming out of the Goblet."

Cedric shook his head and said, "No need to apologize if it isn't your fault Harry, though I will enjoy competing against you."

"Thank you. Though I will tell you three something that my research has turned up. Universally the first task involves single combat against some sort of magical creature. And it has been about a dozen Tournaments since they have used dragons. Just warning you lot."

The three older students stared at Harry with various looks of incredulity on their faces when the door to the Great Hall opened again to admit the Heads of the three schools, Professor McGonagall, Bagman, Crouch, and Moony.

Bagman was rather animated, rubbing his hands together and saying, "Well this is quite unprecedented, it looks as though we have a... fourth... champion."

Madame Maxime and Professor Karkaroff started to argue about withdrawing their schools from the competition, but were pointedly told about the 'binding, magical contract', to which Harry started laughing. All of the adults present, save for Moony, gave him various dirty looks.

Wiping a tear from his eye, and straightening as though he was completely unaffected by the glares. "If you are going to go through the trouble of saying a phrase like that call the situation what it really

is. The Goblet of Fire will torture any of the champions that refuse to compete into insanity."

Everyone present, with exceptions again for Moony and now also Fleur, stared at Harry like he was a complete and utter madman.

"What? Have none of you done your research on just where the extremely powerful magical object you are using on school children comes from? I found out that the descriptions of the Goblet of Fire and an artifact used in the Colosseum in Ancient Rome are frighteningly similar with only an hour or so of research. Are you telling me that no one in the history of this Merlin forsaken Tournament has done that?"

As everyone save the prior two mentioned continued to stare at The-Boy-Who-Lived, Harry decided to splutter to himself a few times, and then mutter an extremely disparaging 'wizards'.

Having effectively cut through all of the arguments that would crop up about either pulling out their champion or whether Harry would have to compete.

Rolling his eyes, Harry tapped his foot against the floor, waiting the people who were supposed to be in charge to gather themselves back together, while Mad-Eye was railing on about how this was an assassination attempt...

Idly flipping the pages of the small booklet he had been given Harry was a little disconcerted about little the rules actually had changed from the last time the Tournament had been pulled out of mothballs. And if what was written about that particular iteration is correct, no one survived past the first task.

But then again the idiot who had planned the task had somehow gotten his hands on a nundu. There were no reports that explained just how the most dangerous magical creature in existence had been; a, captured; b, transported to Durmstrang; and c, how anyone watching the task has survived.

And then a stray thought brought Harry to a full stop, his eyes widening as much as humanly possible.

"I am staying as far away from Africa as humanly possible. I am not going to end up with a bloody nundu as a familiar. No. It is not going to happen."

He continued on in that manner for few minutes while he shuddered at the thought of having to keep company with one of those killing machines, and then read the last page of the rulebook. He nodded and slipped it into an inside pocket of his robes. The rules on the side of the champions boiled down to two phrases, both of which brought a rather feral grin to Harry's face when they were combined.

'That which is not forbidden is allowed' were the first words written in what he had just read. That did not seem like something which promoted international cooperation, but then again, the last words in the book were 'it is only cheating if you get caught before the task starts' which gave an even better view of just how the committee who wrote this version of the rulebook view the Tri-Wizard Tournament.

But, given that he had read excerpts from the very first competitor rulebook, and that what was in that seemed to be in line with the 'purpose' of the Tournament, it could be attributed to an idea that was born in good intentions becoming tarnished over the years.

Another good thing is that there was no standardized 'uniform' for the champions, so he could start fabrication on the armored clothing he was planning, and finding a way to smuggle his equipment into the task with him.

Bad news was that the first task was scheduled to take place on Wednesday the Twenty-first. And the only hint that had been given was that the task was going to 'test their daring'. He'd have to get in on whatever pool the school's resident student bookies would be setting up. He was almost certain the the advice he had dropped on his fellow champions was correct.

He idly started to list all of the things he needed to do. Near the top was getting Padfoot to move into Hogsmeade, fetching the family book of shadows from Potter Manor, setting up whatever it was he was going to end up doing with time compression... He continued adding objectives to his ever growing itinerary, shuffling about the various tasks to get some of the more important ones to the fore.

He'd need to get off the grounds at one point, and was glad that part of the rules allowed for him to get off school grounds for upwards of seven hours a week, so long as he was accompanied by a member of the faculty.

Muttering distractedly to himself in Gaelic, Harry continued on his way to the Gryffindor Common Room.

After being mobbed by the entirety of Gryffindor, many of whom asked him who had entered him into the Tournament or wished him good luck in winning (or as a few of the more pessimistic put it, surviving), Harry had managed to win through to the boys' dorms.

He looked at where Alistair sat on one of his bed posts, and though he had spoke a few times with the Hat, they had talked a little about what the hell was going to end up troubling Harry this year...

...:Flashback Begin:...:

Harry sat crossed-legged on his bed, the night of the First. One of the school elves had popped in with Alistair a little after ten at night, and the Hat was now set on the bed with him, the curtains of the fourposter drawn with a bevy of spells applied to them to ensure that there was some privacy.

"So, Alistair, Tri-Wizard Tournament?"

"Nothing good will come of this Harry. As one sentient artifact speaking of an other, that blasted cup has nothing in its workings to prevent someone from being bound to compete against their will. What is more that is when the damn thing is active, it puts off enough energy to confuse the wards in a sphere with a dozen yards radius. Take a look at the map after they light the bastard and you'll see what I mean."

"I've got a few rough plans that I can start rolling, but I want to know for sure whether or not I will be competing before I start putting resources into use."

"Aye, laddie, I would suggest that. There is nothing we can do until the Goblet is lit, and even less in the period there is between then and the naming of the champions."

"So, we're basically in a holding pattern until next Sunday."

"Yes. Get some sleep Harry, though I think we'll put off seeing what is new and different about you Occlumency until a day or two after the champions are named."

"Night Alistair."

"Goodnight Harry."

:::Flashback End:::

"Well, Alistair, the expected as come to pass."

"And so hope once more goes unanswered. They spill the beans about the first task?"

"A 'test of daring'. I say that it is going to have something to do with dragons. The first task is always magical creatures, and it has been awhile since the Tournament has used them."

"Hopefully there won't be a repeat of what happened last time..."

"Last time there was a nundu..." Harry shivered at the mention of that particular creature.

"Well you could be wrong and end up fighting a chimera."

"Which is why I am going to put together a 'bag of tricks' that I can (hopefully) summon to myself with ease."

"And just what are you planning on stocking said bag with?"

"My latest test staff, various magical explosives, spears with heads coated in basilisk venom, a couple hundred feet of chain that is the very least rune reinforced if not made of some high test magical metal..."

"Harry, just how much overkill are you going for?"

"There is no such thing as overkill. There is only 'open fire' and 'reload'. Where was I?"

"Chains."

"Oh yes, and various other... oddities that I feel may or may not be useful."

"Do I even want to know?"

"Probably not. Any suggestions?"

"Nothing I feel comfortable making. You'll likely blow it out of proportions."

"Or just blow it up."

"That too. How are you planning on getting this done?"

"I'm fairly certain I can get a space that I can use time compression magics on fairly soon."

"Just how compressed are we talking about?"

"I reliably and efficiently compress a day down into an hour, and have it run for seven real hours. The chamber will then need to reset for three days from the point compression began before it can be used again. Though the rune structure will collapse after fifty two compressed weeks. I'll be heading to Potter Manor tomorrow and seeing if House Potter managed to keep their hands on their house time turner..."

"If Potter doesn't have theirs, ask you reprobate of a godfather. Black will almost certainly have access to theirs still. Are you going to be turning full days?"

"Don't know. Mostly I want to use it so that I can get the compression chamber up and running by Wednesday night at the latest. That'll get me three compressed weeks in addition to nine days, not counting Wednesday the Twenty-first."

"Well if you double up on days, you'll be able to attend class (Harry scoffed at that, while he got some insight into the magic from watching the teachers do examples, and the additional explanations of theory was helpful at times, there were also many times where he

was dreadfully bored) and continue to act as a quasi-normal teenager, while still having very full days to prepare yourself."

"We don't even know if I can get my hands on a time turner, so all it is right now is idle planning..."

"Planning is a good thing Harry."

"I know, I've been making a list of things I'd like to get done..."

"That is a start young man..."

Harry had caught up to his Head of House as she exited the Great Hall after breakfast the following morning.

"Good morning, Professor McGonagall, I need to speak with you about a few things concerning the Tournament."

"Of course Mister Potter, what is it?"

"There is an... allowance... in the competitors' rules that allows champions to leave the host school's grounds for seven hours a week, either to seek help from family members, purchase research materials, or as it is most often used, make a Will. This is of course with the caveat that champions who are minors must be accompanied by a member of the faculty. I need to make trips to Diagon Alley, Potter Manor, and the Marauders' Manor."

"I can see why you need to do that Mister Potter, I will see about getting a member of the staff to escort you..."

"I was thinking of asking you if Hagrid is free. He is the only person on the faculty that is both in on the Secret of the Marauders' Manor and is still keyed for entry through the Potter Manor wards."

McGonagall stopped for a moment, thinking, and then she nodded. "Yes, I believe that Hagrid is not doing anything too pressing for a moment. Go collect your cloak and whatever you will need to bring with you, and I will send a message to Hagrid via one of the House-Elves. Meet him at his cabin. Tell me which classes you have this morning, and I will about sending messages to you professors about missing your morning class. But that does not mean if you finish quickly that you are excused from whatever classes remain."

"Thank you Professor. What I have planned may take place very quickly, or it may drag on toward lunch."

"Though I may not be able to render you the help I would want to in the Tournament Mister Potter, I do wish you good luck."

Harry jogged to keep pace with the half-giant as they reached the gates of the school. As soon as they got beyond the wards, Harry grabbed Hagrid by the arm, and warned him that he was about to activate his House portkey to Potter Manor.

As his feet hit the ground after the trip, he said in a slightly loud voice, "Darda?"

A swift 'pop', and a voice said, "Yes, Master Harry?"

Harry spoke quietly to his head elf while Hagrid stared about the room, "Can you fetch me the family book of shadows, or does the magic of it prevent you from touching it?"

"I can get the book for you Master Harry. Is there anything else that you be needing?"

"Yes, do you know whether or not that House Potter still has a time turner?"

The elf nodded enthusiastically.

"Can you also fetch that for me?"

Another happy nod.

"Thank you very much Darda."

The elf popped away, and Harry moved over to the fireplace to begin the process of unlocking the Floo for an hour or so. Since he had taken ownership of Potter Manor, he had kept the wards at a relatively high level of activity, ensuring that only he, the elves, and a few others could even get to the property. Harry had not been entirely truthful to McGonagall about Hagrid still being keyed to the wards, even if Sirius had trusted the monster-loving man with the Secret of his own home. Rather it was the fact that the Family

portkey could be used to temporarily allow someone access to the property.

As he had just finished prepping the Floo for his and Hagrid's use, Darda came popping back in with a large book with a velvet bag perched on top of it. They had only spent about five minutes at their current location.

"Here you goes Master Harry, the two things you have been asking for."

"Once more thank you Darda. We'll be coming back here to take a return portkey after I finish my other business."

The elf smiled happily as Harry place the precious, precious book in the bag he had brought with him, and placed the velvet back, after having checked it for its highly controlled contents, into a pocket of his robes.

"Hagrid, we're going to the Leaky Cauldron first."

Harry picked up some Floo powder and made his way through.

Harry's run into Diagon Alley consisted only of a trip into the vaults at Gringotts, which Hagrid begged off on 'holding his hand' commenting on his absolute dislike for the mine carts, before they went to their last stop.

As Harry stepped through the Floo into the Marauders' Manor, he yelled at the top of his lungs, "Padfoot, get your mangy arse down here, now!"

Not two minutes later, the prankster made his way into the den. As he entered, Harry said, "I haven't seen today's Daily Prophet yet, but just in case they missed last night's events, I am the fourth Tri-Wizard Champion."

The two got into a huddle, during which Harry handed him the keys to the only Potter property in Hogsmeade (they would take up residence by Friday afternoon), had Padfoot act as a sounding board for actions to take against a dragon ("Go for the eyes"), and then asked Sirius if he could borrow some money (to which he got

slapped upside the head and told that if it would help him survive long enough to inherit, it was not borrowing).

As they kicked around a few other trains of thought Bella walked into the room holding the morning edition of the Prophet. The headline was to expected, though part of it relieved Harry.

Boy-Who-Lives Fourth Tri-Wizard Champion

Denies Any Involvement in Being Chosen by Oath

Harry blinked a few times and then nodded. "Alright, well at least that answers one thing on my mind. Anything else you two can think of that might help me live to see fifteen?"

Sirius paused for a moment and said, "Yes, keep your communication mirror on you at all times. I'll do the same."

Nodding Harry said, "Of course, I'll probably be more than properly paranoid by the end of the school year..." before he called out, "Dobby!"

Talking to the house elf after he had popped into the room, Harry delivered a handful of orders to the excitable being. He then gave his goodbyes, and went back through the Floo with Hagrid to Potter Manor, followed by using the return function of the Family portkey.

Returning to his dormitory after having finished his classes, Harry started grabbing things that he thought he may need. He was actually rather lucky in the fact the McGonagall was usually one of the first Professors to take breakfast. He had actually only missed half an hour of Herbology, and had easily caught up to the remainder of the class.

Double checking his mental lists, and snatching his invisibility cloak (if you were going to move around the castle while there were two of you about, and when meeting yourself could result in some very unpleasant results, it would be best if one of your were never seen.) Harry placed the box with his shrunk trunks in his bag. He walked over to the potion that was in progress near his bed and gave it a quick once over to ensure that everything was proceeding smoothly.

He made his way over to the top floor of the North wing, going over the ways to determine whether a space had been expanded or not. He felt an ache forming between his eyes at the thought of having to expand an already expanded space.

'Ugh. The calculations are tedious, the anchoring rune arrays overly complex, and the expanding process in and of itself is going to be a massive magic sink if the room I use is already in an enlarged space...'

Dobby twitched several as he waited for Master Harry. He had been asked earlier in the day to secure this room and secure it he did! No one besides a few bugs and a mouse or two had come into it since he had taken up his guard post, besides Master Harry having appeared out of nowhere five or so minutes after he had gotten there.

Yes he had swept the floor, dusted the furniture (after having had to fix some of it), and had even got some scrubbing done, but now he was starting to get bored. He was starting to think about getting cleaning again but what to...

"Hello Dobby."

"Master Harry!"

"So where did I show up?"

Dobby pointed to a corner of the room.

He spoke as he was checking his watch, "Thank you Dobby. I'll probably be in one of the other rooms on this floor of the wing, working. Feel free to check and see if I need anything."

Finishing that, he took the velvet bag out of his pocket and draped an ornate hourglass with platinum workings and a platinum chain around his neck. Taking the diving in both hands, he started to give the hourglass a number of turns before he faded from sight.

Dobby quickly popped through a few of the other rooms, to see if his Master Harry needed anything.

Eventually coming to a room much larger than any of the others he had seen easily the size of a large football pitch with the ceiling raised to being at least twice as high from where the others had been, he saw Master Harry laying on the floor, taking deep heaving breaths.

"Are you okays Master Harry?"

"Ah Dobby, how marvelous to see you... Do you think you could go to the kitchens and get me something to eat? I am a mite bit peckish."

Idly picking at the plate of food with a fork in one, Harry used construction conjuration to start calling forth the materials he would need for the next stage of his project. He was going to need to head to bed soon, and had in fact slept part way through the planning process for enlarging the room.

He cursed under his breath at remembering that. The room was indeed part of an expanded space to begin with, and the process of bringing it up to the dimensions he thought he would need. And even thinking of it made his head swim with visions of calculations passing before his eyes.

He was going to need to work out some kind of schedule to keep himself from falling asleep during the middle of the day. Harry had one thought to sum up the haze of thoughts and plans that were floating in his head.

'This is going to be a long ten days...'

He blinked a few times, before cracking up, and literally rolling on the floor in laughter.

Tuesday had passed quickly enough, though there was the slight issue that Harry had Astronomy tonight, but he shrugged it off and turned himself back to that morning, and headed back to the area he was working on.

Conjuring more material (almost exclusively marble), while for the sake of variation vanishing bits of detritus and excess furniture, Harry idly noted that it looked like Dobby had spent the night scrubbing the floor and walls... and quite possibly the ceiling too.

He'd have to thank the little elf for that later. It would make covering the surfaces in an inch and a half of marble that much easier...

A few hours later Harry used a spell to call forth a few spheres of light before he vanished the lamps on the walls of the room so that he could finish sheathing the walls in marble. Where ever there was a joint between walls, ceiling, or floor, the marble curved from one surface to another, leaving one continuous surface.

Though that was not the only thing that had changed. In the middle of the room, sitting a yard from any of the other surfaces, though supported by a number of columns and beams connecting to various points, was a box of marble cutting off the remaining space in the room from the now outer area. There were still gaps in the marble, one located at the door that led out to the school and the other that lead into the inner area.

Now came the really, really tedious part. Harry had runic arrays that he was going to have to inscribe one the marble in various places... And the number of times he would have to make the arrays increased proportionally to the size of the area the arrays were in...

"Bugger! I shouldn't have made the room so damn big!"

"Too many runes..."

Harry flung himself down on his bed in the dorms, groaning and muttering to himself. He was glad that he had remembered the wheeled boards that he had heard mechanics used, otherwise it would have been far worse. In fact, after sticking himself to the board, and then using one of the... odder adhesion charms he knew on the wheels, he was able to hang himself upside down and work on surfaces that would normally have his nose to the ground, or crouching on the floor.

Alistair clear his (non-existent) throat. Harry decided rather than asking what the Hat want, to instead think on just how it managed it. Sure, the hat talks, very interesting, but how would one clear a throat that isn't even there?

"How in Merlin's beard do you do that?"

And at this point Harry was fairly certain the hat would be staring at him if it had eyes. Though even though it didn't it still felt like it did...

"Harry?"

"Yes?"

"Get some sleep."

A/N2: Needed to do this to get some kind of clearer focus of what goes when...

And yes, Dobby pointing out where Harry showed up would probably involve some manner of information paradox (I believe the crux of this one is where the choosing of that corner in particular came from, Harry having asked Dobby what part of the room he was standing in when he used the time turner, so how would he know to go to that corner?), but what is the fun of writing about time magics if you can't make some peoples' heads hurt?

I really wanted to borrow jbern's Marauder motto from 'The Lie I've Lived' but he apparently disabled Private Messaging, so I have no way of asking. It's really fitting for the group though. Great story too. It's been awhile since I read it, but I think it was where I got the notion of more than three tasks from. I forget how many though.

Canon Nazis stay away from my class schedule guess work/stuff I made up!

Mon

09AM Double Herbology

10AM ~~~~~

11AM Double Care of Magical Creatures

12PM ~~~~~

01PM Lunch

02PM Free

03PM Double Ancient Runes

04PM ~~~~~~

05PM Arithmancy

Tue

09AM Charms

10AM Double Transfiguration

11AM ~~~~~~

12PM Free

01PM Lunch

02PM Double Defense Against the Dark Arts

03PM ~~~~~~

04PM Double Ancient Runes

05PM ~~~~~~

12AM Double Astronomy

01AM ~~~~~~

Wed

09AM Double Transfiguration

10AM ~~~~~~

11AM Double Potions

12PM ~~~~~~

01PM Lunch

02PM Double Charms

03PM ~~~~~~

04PM Double History of Magic

05PM ~~~~~~

Thur

09AM Double History of Magic

10AM ~~~~~~

11AM Free

12PM Charms

01PM Lunch

02PM Double Arithmancy

03PM ~~~~~~

04PM Double Defense Against the Dark Arts

05PM ~~~~~~

Fri

09AM Double Herbology

10AM ~~~~~~

11AM Double Care of Magical Creatures

12PM ~~~~~~

01PM Lunch

02PM Free

03PM Double Potions

04PM ~~~~~

05PM Arithmancy

I am trying to remember what I think was a one-shot in a series of various one-shots. I cannot for the life of me remember who the author was, or the name of the story, but it had to do with Madam Hooch raising Harry (I think the story was the expressing of the idea that she was related to the Potter side of the family in some way) and one of the largest hunks of the 'action' of the story was the Holyhead Harpies were there to watch Harry's 'first' flying lesson (if I remember the story correctly, Hooch resigned from Hogwarts after Dumbledore attempted to place Harry with the Dursleys and ended up getting a job of some kind with the aforementioned team.

Anyone who can point me back to this story will be much appreciated. And a bit of a semi-related drabble!

Takes place in a quasi-normal Harry Potter verse

"Bloody hell!"

"Harry language!"

"Sorry Hermione, but I've just been scouted by a professional team..."

"So? Statistically speaking you are one of the best Seekers to come out of Hogwarts in the past few decades."

A disgusting sound followed Hermione's comment.

"Ronald, do not speak with your mouth packed to the brim..."

After finishing the food in his mouth, the red-head said, "Which team? Is it the Cannons?"

"No, Ron, it is not the Cannons. Its the Holyhead Harpies. Which confuses me because I still had the bits that make me a guy when I woke up this morning, and I know that hasn't changed in the past two hours."

The non-green eyed contingent of the Golden Trio were struck speechless, until Hermione said something which Harry (Ron's brain, such as it was, was trying to wrap itself around Harry being scouted for an all female team) would remind her of for years to come, "Bloody hell!"

I know, fairly short, almost entirely point less, but at least it is out of my head.

A/N: I am starting to run out of ways to say this, but I'll say it anyway. I give my thanks to everyone who has taken the time out of their day to review.

I live in New England, and there is officially too much damn snow on the ground.

Took me until after I had almost finished the chapter to think of an original title for it.

Chapter 39: Stealing Candy

Harry stared down into the cauldron, disbelief written on his features. It wasn't fair and it wasn't right. After all the trouble he had taken to move it from the Manor to Hogwarts, after all the time and effort put into the process, and the headache it took to triple the size of the batch, this was not what he expected.

He reached into the cauldron with both hands and scooped out the contents. Barely filling his cupped hands were a pile of metallic blue flakes.

"I'm going to need a bigger cauldron."

It was Sunday morning and while Harry was idly picking at his breakfast, he was still... annoyed at the result of his first attempt at making a magical metal. Though he wasn't sure if he was more upset because he normally didn't get angry or the fact he hadn't been this tired since the last time he had magically exhausted himself.

Though he had been expecting it, his first time compression on Wednesday had been mostly spent setting up the space he was planning on using. It hadn't been until 'late' into the fifth day that he had finally gotten things to an acceptable point that he could pick up on some of his projects. The one on Saturday had been far more productive, but he was starting to feel a little squeezed for time... Part of him wondered how the other champions were dealing with the stress.

He was brought out of his thoughts when Hermione jabbed him in the ribs with her elbow.

"Wha'?"

"You need to actually eat Harry, not stare off into space... Which by the way is just plain strange."

"I was thinking!"

She rolled her eyes at him and said, "Then that just goes to show that something is off with you. You are almost always doing something Harry. Whether it is leafing through any one of the many books you read, working on a Rubik's Cube, or I've even seen you do a puzzle occasionally, I rarely see you ever just stare off into nothing... And besides which I need to talk to you privately about something."

Harry raised an eyebrow in a most question manner as he pulled his wand out and threw up a half a dozen privacy spells, before saying, "And just what is it that you wanted to ask, O smartest witch of her generation?"

She flushed red at the jab, she pushed on anyway, "I was hoping to remind of some advice you tried to give me last year..."

Harry blinked a few times, and then let out a low whistle. "That was quick, how'd I mess up? I wasn't expecting on you to pick up on it for a few more weeks..."

"You'd leave the tower for five minutes (relatively) bright-eyed and bushy-tailed and come back dragging your feet, though it was only an extremely vague guess until you confirmed it for me."

He chuckled lightly and said, "Anything else?"

"Apart from where it came from... not really."

"Family artifact."

"But the Ministry..."

"Has loopholes for everything if it concerns 'family' magics and an Ancient House. More over this particular one was made by a Potter. Which, as we are talking about it anyway, I was underinformed when I talked about the limits of time turners to you last year..."

Her eyes brightened at the talk of discussing some new and different knowledge. She motioned for him to continue.

"By and large, the time turners that I talked about were made with the tried and true methods that Ministries and private enchanters the world wide use. It is not broken, works more than well enough, so why improve it? Potters have a tendency to get bored and do things that most wizards would deem insane, such as building a better mousetrap using Fiendfyre, debating philosophy with a chimera, and, yes, seeking to improve the 'common' time turner."

Hermione just stared at Harry for a moment before saying, "So the fact that you are as bizarre as you are isn't because that you have led a screwed up life, but rather that the majority of Potters are insane?"

Harry nodded and took a few more bites of his breakfast.

"So how far back can it go Harry?"

"Little slip of paper with it said about thirteen hours, and the notes in the Potter book of shadows confirm it..."

"So what preparations are you making for the first task?"

"Ways to incapacitate or kill large magical creatures."

"Why?"

"In the vast, vast majority of the First Tasks of the Tri-Wizard Tournament, it has almost always been some manner of confrontation with a deadly creature. Hagrid would feel right at home with the beasties they have used, especially since he has always said he has wanted a dragon."

Hermione blinked several times, the thought of school and government officials putting school children up against dragons causing a great deal of upset to her. She also decided to see what she could dig up on the history of the tournament.

"But what are you planning?"

Harry smiled smugly, and said, after dropping the privacy spells around them with a twitch of his wand, "That would be telling."

Later that day, Harry finally managed to get to another task that was fairly high on his to-do list.

"Fred, George, I have an offer that you might find interesting."

"Oh, and just what does ickle..."

"Harrykins think could interest us?"

"I need a pair of test subjects so that I can get some practical experience with illusions..." George opened his mouth to say something, though Harry just plowed ahead, "And I can't use the Slytherins because I want actual feedback on what I am doing."

The twins shared a silent conversation lasting all of a few minutes, before Fred said, "What are you offering?"

"Five galleons an hour each, you two will be told before I start any illusion, and I won't use any illusions I feel are mentally scarring."

The Weasleys shared one more wordless conversation, before they broke into wicked looking grins.

"We have just one..."

"... thing that we want to ask in addition."

"For every week that you hire us for more than..."

"... four hours, you have to help us by testing three of our 'products'."

"Boys, you are forgetting one thing. Transformative magics tend to act... wonky when they are used on metamorphs. Since the vast majority of your future joke products are either charmed or potioned candies that do something to alter the one eating the treat..."

The twins facepalmed in perfect unison, though Harry did note that George used his left hand while Fred used his right.

"Fine then we'll..."

"... just have to ask your help..."

"... on getting at the Slytherins. Same..."

"... conditions however."

"Gentlemen, we have an accord."

Later that evening, while the other Fourth Year boys were down in the Common Room Harry was kneeling on his bed, pursuing some meditations of a deeper nature, when his concentration was broken by a certain Hat.

"Harry?"

"Hrm?"

"Are you meditating or napping?"

The next reply was rather mumbled, "Not quite sure..."

"We've gone over what... changes... you've made to your mindscape, and I've taught you just about everything I know about the defensive nature of the Mind Arts..."

"And what little you know about internalized Mind magics."

"Yes, yes, you and the bizarre things that you get up to in that head of yours... Creating aspects of your mind, I swear if you weren't already insane in the inexplicable way that you are, it would have driven you mad. But as I was say, we've never actually tested your defenses..."

"So you want to skirmish with me?"

If the hat could have grinned, it would have been one of the more smug varieties.

"Why is it that I feel I am going to soon be the proud owner of a killer headache?"

Five minutes later found Harry still sitting on his bed, however Alistair was now on his head, poking at his mental shields.

Then the attack began in earnest, massive blows of force striking the outermost walls of Harry's defenses while wedges of thought attempted to worm their way through any gaps that might develop. Harry knew that during an actual attack on his mind, he couldn't take the chance to rebuild any defenses that got undermined, it would only make things worse.

And so he waited for Alistair to make his way through the walls.

He had spent the last (relative) two hours pounding his way through the walls and gates surrounding Harry's mind. Alistair was actually quite proud of the young man. Having brute force shields that could keep him out for that long was truly impressive.

But the gate, while truly monstrous as gates go, was weaker than the wall. As the Hat moved from into the next section of Harry's mind, he found that he was no longer an amorphous haze of thought. He stopped for a moment, and wondered at being forced into a physical form. He looked down at his hands.

A physical, human form.

Alistair decided it was now time to see just how constrained to the laws of this place he was. It was a little known fact, but the type of defenses built were just as important as how they were constructed. When walls were built to block, they had to be undermined or a weakness exploited. When the same walls were built into a maze, you could destroy them to your heart's content and get no further into the mind. You had to traverse what was created to move on.

He hopped into the air, landing back onto his feet. Flight was out. He took a few steps and only moved a few feet. So was super speed. He twitched a few times. And transforming into anything other than human was also not going to happen.

Alistair sighed and pulled a wand from his pocket and gave it an experimental wave. Ah, sparks. At least he had magic. Still, this was going to be very interesting.

Three Harrys sat on a couch passing a bucket of popcorn between themselves watching Alistair make his way through their mind from multiple angles on four big screen tellies.

Beast grinned ear to ear, and said, "Wait for it, wait for it... NOW!"

And the trio dissolved into laughter as the Hat was savaged by a small white rabbit.

Morpheus smiled serenely (the expression reminded the other two of Luna, bless her insane little heart) as he sent an attempt to eject the Hat from the mind of Harry Potter.

The only reaction from Alistair was the conjuring of a sword to skewer the vorpal-bunny.

Beast scowled and then hissed out, "Boo! Give him a red card ref, cruelty to animals!"

Alistair limped his way into the library, fighting off the occasional attempt to eject him from the young man's mind. It was bad enough he had barely survived the traps that had been strewn about the path to this place, but all the manner of vicious creatures that continued to pop up was getting on his last nerve. He scowled as he dragged himself over to a book shelf and opened one of the tomes...

He read a few pages and found naught but bloody bad poetry. He kept looking...

He was ready to rip his body's hair out in frustration fifteen minutes later. There was nothing in here except for the most horrid rhyming in existence. Though for some reason he had not found any Seuss. Maybe Harry was fond of those books...

Alistair brought his palm to his forehead as he saw a spiral staircase in the middle of the room. He had been so caught up at being past the traps that he had not thought he wasn't at the end of Harry's defenses.

The Hat slumped down the stairs, and exited through the door at the bottom.

To find himself in a endless field of bright green grass with a gray tower that disappeared into the sky in the center. Now he just wanted to cry. He'd completely forgotten that his first choice of Houses for this young man had been Slytherin.

Just as he started to trek toward the distant tower, he heard a cry of, "Boot-to-the-head!" Which was followed by a sharp pain in his skull, with the strongest attempt to eject him from the mindscape yet. He caught a glimpse of who kicked him out of the corner of his eye but he was caught completely off guard, he was ejected back into his vessel, which then tumbled off of Harry's head.

Back on the couch the Beast, Morpheus, and the original Harry (the last of which was actually rolling on the floor) were all laughing themselves sick at the antics of their newest aspect.

Morpheus gasped out, "I knew it was a good idea to make that guy. So what do we name him?"

Beast managed to get himself under enough control to only snicker, and said, "We all know who we modeled him after..."

Harry sat up, still chortling, "Yes, but do we name him after the actor or the character?"

One more Harry stepped into the room. He was wearing a blue plaid long sleeved shirt and blue jeans, and lugging around a chainsaw.

"Can I have my boomstick now?"

Harry came back to reality to find the Hat grumbling irately in Welsh.

"Hey, Al, don't blame me for the fact you wanted a live fire test of my defenses."

The Hat twitched in Harry's direction, and the last Potter could have sworn that it was giving him a dirty look when Alistair said, "Just who the hell booted me in the head?"

"My newest aspect, who has domain over all things involving combat and asskickery, Bruce."

The was a groan from Alistair, before he spoke, "Please tell me that you didn't..."

"Make him in the image of the king of Badassery Ashley J. Williams of the Evil Dead series as portrayed by Bruce Campbell?"

"Yes him."

"I'd be lying if I did."

Alistair went back to his mumbling (Harry had heard any of the curses he knew in Welsh used so well before) after Harry moved him off the bed and Harry leaned back against his headboard to repair the damage that Alistair incursion had done to his defenses.

Tuesday had been normal, he had gone to his classes, eaten his meals, turned back to the morning. The time compression array had finished its cooldown from Saturday's use. He'd managed to finish his preparations for the first task. He'd finished the compression having read a bit more from the family book of shadows.

He was currently resting his eyes while he was sitting on top of the Astronomy Tower. He was glad that this particular spot of the school didn't become snog central until after the sun went down. There was still a few hours to go until he caught up with himself. He felt something on the outer most edge of his magical senses, but ignored it. There were four of whatever they were, and they were very magical.

He was currently floating somewhere between being asleep and meditating, and he spent the next several hours like this. Coming out of his little trance, he grumbled hopes that the next task would be far enough away that he would be able to cut back on how hard he was working.

Idly summoning one of his mostly completed projects from where he had left it, Harry stared off into the distance, trying to narrow down where the things that were pinging his magical senses were located.

He glanced at the Quidditch pitch, and saw that it had been overhauled since last year. There had been a lot more seating added. He held out his right hand as he turned toward where Hagrid's hut

was located on the grounds, and caught what looked like an ornate spyglass as it came toward him.

Looking through the object, he looked off into the Forbidden Forest in the distance.

He pulled the device away from his eye and sighed. "I hate being right all the time."

He checked his watch to see if the earlier him had turned back yet, he conjured some parchment, ink, and a quill. He wrote three quick notes, charmed them with to find those they were addressed to. Three origami birds sped off into the castle as he went back to watching what he had found.

Ten minutes later, the door to the top of the Tower had opened, showing Cedric Diggory.

"You wanted to talk to me about something Harry?", he asked warmly.

Harry held out the spyglass toward the Hufflepuff, and said, "To the left of Hagrid's hut, keep looking into the forest. It'll be hard to miss it."

Cedric shrugged, and accepted the optical device, and looked where Harry directed him. And then he started muttering under his breath passing the spyglass back to Harry, saying words that no self respecting 'Puff should ever say. And Fleur took that moment to come onto the top of the tower.

She said, with her thick French accent, while smiling warmly at Harry, "Hello, Harry, Cedric. You wanted to show me something Harry?"

He directed her to look at the same area he had. She saw what both of the Hogwarts students had already seen, and turned to Harry to say, "If you say 'I told you so', I'll make it so that there will never be any more Potters. Understood?"

Harry nodded vigorously.

Fleur continued on, "I assume we are waiting for...", before she was interrupted by the last champion and his brother came through the door.

Viktor grunted his greetings, to which Ivan said, in a rather cheeky manner, "I'll translate that for those of not fluent in barely verbal communications. 'Good evening to all of you, Harry what do you want?'"

Harry handed the elder Bulgarian the spyglass, directed him where to look and waited. When Viktor finally found what he was told to look for, he started muttering under his breath, easily heard in the silence as the three other champions and one family member waited.

"Horntail, Fireball, Short-snout... and a Welsh Green? Welsh Greens are considered the adorable harmless puppies of the dragon breeds...", Viktor scoffed as he spoke the latter part.

Harry grunted in a vaguely disgruntled manner at that and said, "And all four appear to be nesting mothers."

Both Fleur and Cedric swore in their native tongues at that bit of news, and then all of the champions in their majority started muttering complaints about Ministry officials.

An owl winged its way over to Harry, and landed on the parapet near him, holding out its leg. Harry pulled the message and started reading it, after thanking the bird. After finishing reading, he flicked his hand in the direction of Gryffindor Tower.

"So anyone need to talk to me about anything?"

Viktor grunted and said, in his nearly unintelligible accent, as he passed the spyglass back to Harry, "How did you get telescope to see through trees?"

"I was wondering who would notice that. Its a little enchantment that predates the Statue of Secrecy, used primarily by military scouts. Depending on how it is cast, it can thin out the appearance of a forest through telescopes. I've got this one tuned to a one to twenty ratio. I was an enjoyable little project that I never thought I'd get any use from."

Harry idly held out his hand and caught a broom that was speeding in his direction. "Anything else? I need to talk to a half-giant about a few things..."

There were general noises that there was nothing more to be said, so Harry had one last thing to say before he took off on his Firebolt, "Well, I bid you all good evening, and good luck tomorrow."

Landing in front of the very large man's cabin, Harry shouldered his broom, and knocked on the door.

He heard, "One minute, one minute...", before the door swung open and revealed the bearded visage of Hagrid, who then said, "Harry? I thought I didn't ask ya to come until much later..."

"I already know about the dragons, and I suspected that would be what the first task would be long before they got here. What I want to know is whose idea it was for you to tell show me them?"

"I just wanted to help ya Harry..."

"I know Hagrid, and thank you for telling me, but who thought it would be a good idea to have you help me cheat?"

The large man looked down at his feet, and kicked one of his massive feet back and forth, looking for all the world like a massive, hairy child caught in some wrong doing.

"Moody."

"Oh, alright."

"That's it Harry? 'Alright?'"

"My father knew Alastor Moody, the paranoid maniac that he is, fairly well. He help my dad when he was training to be Hit Wizard. He told my dad, 'The only fair fight you get into is one where you have no other choice.' From what I understand the Mad-eyed Auror was actually quite fond of my old man."

"Ah. You want some tea Harry?"

"Just so long as I don't have to eat any of your Rock Cakes, I would love a cup of tea Hagrid."

Harry had trouble sleeping that night, eventually having to settle for stunning himself. And at breakfast the next morning, he found himself barely capable of eating. Eventually, Dumbledore rose to address the collected mass of students.

"In honor of today's event, there will be no classes today," Hermione made a disappointed noise from her seat near Harry, "The first task is scheduled to being at one in the afternoon, at the Quidditch Stadium, though the champions will be asked head down there at half past eleven. Lunch today will start at eleven, and run until half past twelve."

Harry, not able to eat anymore, rose from his seat after Dumbledore had finished his announcement. "I have a few last minute preparations to make. I may or may not see you before the task."

Harry walked down to the Stadium, dressed in the armored clothing he had made. The pants were relatively loose fitting and had many pockets running along the sides, the shirt was nothing more than a simple t-shirt, he had a new pair of leather boots, a pair of leather fingerless gloves, and a trench coat. All of it was black, save for a Hogwarts emblem that Harry had added to the left shoulder of the coat.

He felt a little under protected with his shield ring off of his finger.

Bagman was waiting for Harry outside of a tent place near one of the larger entrances to the stadium.

"Ah, Harry, my boy, come here for a moment. You are the first champion to get here. I'd like to speak to you for a moment..."

"Yes, Mister Bagman?"

"Please, call me Ludo when no one else is around. Do you have any idea what you are going to do about the task today?"

"Several..."

The elder man smiled condescendingly, and said, "But how would you..."

Harry viciously cut in, "Because for the vast majority of the iterations of this competition, the first task always seems to follow the line of having something to do with dangerous magical beasts. Now, I assume that the champions are supposed to wait in the tent?"

The retired Quidditch player simply nodded, and Harry brushed past him. In the tent were a number of benches, Harry decided against sitting on one of them, and instead knelt down on both knees, and began meditating.

Harry heard someone sneaking up behind him, and then whisper just behind his ear, "Harry?"

"Yes, Fleur?"

The French champion huffed as she took a few steps away from Harry, and said, "I was hoping to see you jump a few feet into the air..."

Harry rolled his eyes as he levered himself back onto his feet, and asked, "And why was that?"

"I thought it would be funny!"

All Harry did to reply was a combination grunt/snort that rather inelegantly conveyed his wry amusement at the blonde's antics.

They killed what time was left for the other champions and the people in charge to get there by debating whether or not modern art could even deserved to be called art. Harry was of the firm opinion that random splashes of paint and compacted cars do not an artist make, while Fleur held out on that fact that all modern art was not like that trash.

At roughly twenty of twelve, the four champions were using various means of distracting themselves (Cedric was rereading the latest edition of Quidditch Quarterly, Viktor had borrowed one of Harry's Rubik's Cubes shortly before the cup and was playing with that, while Fleur and Harry continued to talk), when Crouch, stood at the back of the tent and said, "If I could have your attention please.

"Before we can commence with today's event, we must first have the ceremonial Weighing of the Wands to ensure that the wands in use by the champions are in proper working order. To do this, we have retained the services of Master Ollivander. Lots have been drawn by the heads to determine the order in which the champions shall go. Mr. Diggory?"

Cedric made his way over to the strange old man, and proffered his wand. As Ollivander examined it, he said, "Ah, yes, I remember this one. Ash, twelve and a quarter inches. Pleasantly springy. When I took the tail hair from a particularly fine male unicorn. Almost gored me with his horn after I removed the hair (Harry took this chance to once more yell out that Unicorns get a bad rap for being whippy when the prove of badassery has just been show). Avis." A flock of birds burst from the tip of the wand. "Marvelous, as good as the day I sold it."

"I polished it last night."

Cedric returned to his magazine as Viktor was called to the fore.

"Hrm. Quite ridged and much thicker than you would usually see. Is this a Gregorovitch creation?"

Viktor nodded and said, "One of the last, before he went into retirement."

"I have never really been fond of his work (Harry once more had his own interruption, "You're British, any work other than your own you find substandard."). Hornbeam and... dragon heartstring? A most unusual combination. Ten and quarter inches." He gestured with the wand, causing a fountain of wine to shoot out.

As Viktor shuffled his way back to a bench, Fleur was called to have her wand examined.

"Ahh. Rosewood, nine and a half inches. Rather inflexible. And is this... Veela hair?"

"It was my grandmother's..."

"I've always found Veela hair to be a bit temperamental... Orchideous."

As Fleur returned to where she and Harry had been sitting, Harry came forward, knowing only he had been left, manually drawing his wand from its sheath at the base of his neck.

"Yes. One of my masterpieces. In fact, this wand may well be my magnum opus. Dragonwood, Thirteen inches. The entwined heartstrings of a particularly violent Hungarian Horn, a massive Ukrainian Ironbelly, and a Roman Black found not far from the Seven Hills of Rome, I think they said it died halfway through the first century AD. The grip leather came from a Normandy White that died in its sleep at the ripe old age of two hundred. The runes are silver and gold that came from a dragon's horde, and the magical sinks an alloy of Black Steel and a pair of scales from a Chinese Fireball that was found to enjoy watching Quidditch." He jabbed the wand at Harry, and grinned wickedly. "As mighty as the day I first made it."

He handed the wand back to Harry, who spoke under his breath, "I forgot to ask how I would tell if I needed to have how much energy my wand stores increase..."

Ollivander nodded and then said, "It is easy, runes will start to etch themselves in the metal, it should end at seven runes per strip of metal."

"Thank you sire."

Harry then slumped away, knowing that the strange old man had forced his morphed features to revert. He scowled as he brought his appearance back to what he considered normal, though he left his hair short, seeing as how he would soon be tangling with a dragon.

Bagman came to the forefront, rubbing his hands together, as Harry unceremoniously dropped himself back into his seat by Fleur. "Now, the press wants some pictures before the first task..."

After the photo session (Harry was forced to concede to being a part of a group shot, though he absolutely refused to be in individual photos), the champions were served lunch in the tent if they had yet to eat, and they heard the stadium slowly fill with the students from

three schools and those that had managed to get their hands on tickets to the first task.

Harry hadn't felt up to talking anymore, his nerves having started to feel a bit frayed, so he sat back against one of the walls of the tent and pulled a puzzle ring from a pocket of his jacket and started to play with it. He occasionally had to force himself to focus on the puzzle in front of him.

Harry was eventually brought out his reverie when he heard someone say, in a poor attempt to sound official, "The time for the first task approaches." The Potter heir looked up and saw that Bagman was speaking again, "Your objective is to retrieve the golden egg. Now," He held out a purple velvet bag, "You will each draw something from this bag, and it will determine what you will face, and the order you go in. Drawing shall take place in the same order as the Weighing of the Wands. A member of the Hogwarts staff will come and escort each champion when his or her turn comes, and the tent will be silenced so that you go into the task knowing as much about it as any of the others."

Cedric went up first, as Harry picked himself up off the ground. He pulled out of the an animated model of a bluish-gray Swedish Short-snout, with a number one around its neck. Viktor came next and drew the scarlet Chinese Fireball, which was numbered three. Fleur drew the Common Welsh Green with the number two. Harry reached into the bag, already knowing what he would get. The Hungarian Horntail, and he was going last.

He looked at each of his fellow champions, and gave a small half-smile. "I wish you all the best of luck." They each echoed his sentiments.

Hagrid came to get Cedric, and they all settled down to wait, with Harry grumbling about how this year was going to give him ulcers as he pulled out the puzzle ring he was working on earlier.

Harry hated waiting, and watched as, one by one, the other champions went out to face their dragons. Finally a short time after Viktor had been led out, Hagrid came and led Harry away, the giant of a man doing his best to encourage Harry. They stopped at a large pair of doors, and Hagrid gave Harry one last encouraging pat on the shoulder that nearly sent him to the ground.

Righting himself and squaring his shoulders, Harry listened as Ludo Bagman once more played announcer.

"Now ladies and gentlemen, we have our last champion to compete today, also from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Harry Potter!"

As doors in front of him swung open to deafening applause, and he drew his wand while he stepped out onto a rocky terrain that used to be his favorite Quidditch pitch. He idly considered various forms of prank based revenge if it was not back to being an actual pitch by the time next school year rolled around.

"And the dragon that he shall be facing is a Hungarian Horntail."

Harry cursed in Gobbledegook as a disillusionment field on the other end of the pitch dropped and the dragoness roared, revealing a far larger than average Horntail. He flicked his wand in the direction of the Astronomy Tower, summoning his bag of tricks. He wasn't entirely sure which plan he was going to go with, but he wanted the options that his 'toys' gave him.

A minute later, and while he was going over some of the more complicated methods he had come up with to neutralize the dragon, he snatched the flying rucksack out of the air.

He dropped to one knee, and started digging through the bag, muttering under his breath as he encountered various items.

"Hand grenades that leave great gobs of acid, basilisk venom coated spears, highly unstable test staff, Dart O' Doom..."

Kastrix was beyond angry. Yes, it was amusing that the little Green had been put to sleep by a Veela. The Chinese bint getting shot in the eye and trampling half her eggs was sad, but she should have known better. When the little two legs shoot lights at your eyes you dodge. The fact that the Short-snout got distracted by a dog was funny. She was never, ever going to live that down if Kastrix had anything to do with it.

But now it was her turn to jump through hoops for the amusement of these Gaia-forsaken two legs. Well she would show them, hopefully

hers would make a half decent snack, irregardless of the fact that she found two legs a little – She let loose a roar. This one's magical aura was unbelievable, she crouched low over her eggs, and sniffed the air as he started speaking softly to himself...

She shook her head a few times after hearing the first half a dozen items. It was a litany of pain! This little two leg could very well kill her! She started thinking quickly, still sniffing at the air. Humans could not understand them, and he smelled of paranoia and preemptive violence... and just a whiff of... serpent-speaker? Oh joyous day, she would live long enough to see her hatchlings come into the world!

"... Greek Fire, plain old muggle dynamite..."

He was interrupted in his inventory by the dragon making a noise that closely resembled the joyful crowing of someone who had just hit the jackpot... except it was a dragon making the sound.

He looked up from his bag to see what could only be described as a dragon smiling. He vaguely heard Bagman making an ass out of himself trying to comment on whatever the hell it was that was going on. Harry looked back down at the bag and then slapped himself in the forehead with the palm of one of his hands.

He had been planning wholesale slaughter without even ruling out the simplest solution...

She was gonna live, she was gonna live... She was also damn glad that all dragons knew how to speak serpent. She opened her mouth and hissed out the word, ~Human I have a...~ And was interrupted by the false golden egg flying out of her nest.

Harry caught the egg to the complete and utter silence of every last being in the Stadium. He just stared down at his prize for a moment, completely dumbstruck himself that every last single person involved had forgotten to charm these damn things to resist the summoning charm. And then it hit him that the dragon had started speaking Parseltongue when he summoned the egg, he looked up to see...

Kastrix stared at the little two leg for a few moments, then stared at the egg, she then looked at the crowd. She repeated this a few

times, trying to wrap her mind around the sheer idiocy on display here when she heard...

~What is it that you wished to say?~

~I was going to offer to hand the false egg over to you in exchange for not slaying me, but that is now a moot point, I do however have just one observation I would like to make known.~

~Yes, O Great and Fiery One?~

~There is no need to be ridiculous, human. Even if the title is quite flattering.~

~Sorry, I am just finding this all greatly amusing. I never thought to try and speak Parseltongue to a dragon.~

~Yes, yes. You probably assumed that only the ones that slither on the ground speak in hisses. It is actually the language for all reptiles, but I digress. As I was saying, I have observed that we are surrounded by idiots. Complete and utter idiots. Now if you would kindly explain to the red-headed servant that I want three large cows in return for this disaster, or I shall eat a few of his co-workers.~

~I'll go do that... Have a good day, and I wish you and your hatchlings the best.~

Harry walked off the pitch idly considering taking up a field of employment involving dragons when he graduated. That is if he lived that long. Being able to speak to ones charges when no one else could communicate with them would be a great boon to the work... He finally started listening to whatever it was Bagman was prattling on about, he idly noted that the man had been repeating himself a few times since he had gotten the egg.

"And our youngest champion gets his egg in the shortest time, and he didn't even have to move too far from the entrance of the arena!"

Harry pointed at his throat for a moment, muttered a quick sonorus, and said, "I feel like I just stole candy from an mentally challenged baby. Can whoever is in charge of the next task please close up any glaring holes in your plans? Now can we get the scoring on with, I

feel the need to scrub a few layers of skin for the shameless stunt I just pulled."

He countered the spell as he walked back into the door he had entered from. He saw Professor McGonagall waiting for him.

"Hello ma'am."

She just stared at Harry for a moment, seeming to look right through the young man. He remembered the last time she had given him this much scrutiny. Malfoy and Ronald were still occasionally humming verses of 'I'm Henry the Eighth, I am'. It was starting to make him nervous...

She then... smiled? She was smiling at him... How absolutely bizarre.

"Well Mr. Potter, originally I was supposed to take you to the medical tent to get whatever damaged you picked up healed, but apparently you are the only one to come away completely unharmed."

Harry gave his Head of House a clearly questioning look.

"Oh, all the other champions are perfectly fine, or will be in a day or two. Mr. Diggory has some second degree burns, Ms. Delacour suffered a few extremely minor burns, and Mr. Krum got some contusions when he made off with his egg."

Harry followed her up to a section of the stands in clear view of the judges box, who were apparently arguing. "What were their scores?"

"Mr. Diggory was arguably the worst, though it was a wonderful bit of transfiguration in my own opinion. He was hurt the worst and had the slowest time. The judges awarded him thirty-nine points out of sixty. Ms. Delacour and Mr. Krum came out fairly even. Both suffered minor injuries, but had completely separate ways of completing the task. Ms. Delacour favored a slower and surer approach, putting her dragon to sleep, and the only reason she was hurt as badly as she was was because the Welsh Green snored. She was awarded forty-eight points. Mr. Krum how preferred a swift and violent approach, he cast a conjunctivas curse at the Fireball's eye, rushed in and grabbed his egg while the dragon thrashed about in pain. A good many of the real eggs were trampled while the

dragon handlers attempted to get her under control. He was awarded forty-five points for the task."

"Thank you Professor."

He looked off toward the judges who finally settled their dispute. Professor Dumbledore was the first to give his judging, and he point his wand into the air, and the number ten formed from a silver ribbon that appear. Madame Maxime was next, and she also gave Harry a ten. The last Head, Professor Karkaroff, who was being glared at by who Harry could only assume was representative from the German Ministry. He rather sullenly threw up an eight into the air. The aforementioned German gave Harry a nine, while the French representative gave him another ten. Finally Crouch as the last judge gave Harry one more ten.

Harry blinked in surprise. He was far into the lead. Fifty-seven points. Damn. "I'm surprised they didn't dock points for lip."

"So am I. But then again, considering how criminally easy you got off, I think you were allowed. Just what is in that bag Mr. Potter, I could have sworn the dragon was worried when she heard you talking under your breath."

Harry grinned one of the cockiest grins to yet cross his face. "She was."

Harry found himself being dragged off a short while later by Fred and George to meet one of the other brothers. The ever famous Charlie. Why is it everyone who was a fan of the Gryffindor Quidditch team felt the need to compare him to this particular Weasley.

"I must say, Harry, you got off easily. That Horntail is one of the nastier dragons that we have on our reserve. For some reason, the Ministry wanted us to bring the alpha female of our Horntail flight, and there was no talking them out of it."

"Yeah, well she considers you dragon handlers as servants, and told me that she better get a trio live cows, and soon, or she is going to start eating your coworkers for this insult."

The second eldest Weasley rushed off to start talking to the other handlers. Most of his coworkers had families.

As the champions were gathered back together in the tent to receive their instructions for the next task, Harry idly wondered how much more difficult they would make the next one just to make up for the disappointment caused by this screw up.

Crouch walked into the tent, and stood before the four contestants and cleared his throat.

"You have all successfully collect your golden eggs. Congratulations. That will be a vital clue for your fifth task, which will take place some time in February. Now as for the second task, it shall take place on Saturday, the twenty-second of October. It will be a test of how quick you can move and think on your feet. Good luck preparing for the next task."

A/N2: Yes, I have just alluded to the fact that one of the heartstrings in Harry's wand came from a dragon that burned a large portion of ancient Rome to the ground.

I never understood why Fleur got the deadlast in points for the first task. From the way it was written, she was faster than Cedric and got far fewer injuries than him, while harming none of the eggs.

I have put up three 'first chapters' of various stories I have running through my head. A poll is/will be up that will ask which one you want to see developed first.

A/N: I would like to open with an apology for taking so long to update, I make no excuses.

As always, reviews are much appreciated, and I do read each and every single one.

Fixed a continuity snarl I made in chapter 38 that has been pointed out in a review or three. Moony was both at the school and at the Manor. Now he is at the proper place (his job as History teacher).

A bit of inspiration came from a review by Kestrel (if you've read the review, you'll know it when you see it, if you haven't I'll elaborate at the end of the chapter).

Chapter 40: Solid Things (And How To Destroy Them)

It was dinner following the first task, and Harry found himself having to glare at more people than would be normally trying to strike up some form of conversation with him. He wasn't feeling particularly social at the moment, even though he was seated with some of his friends, who were carrying on about the task. One of the things on his mind was if he should name his bag of tricks. Maybe Duffel of Destruction? Or perhaps Rucksack of Ruination?

'Bah, I'll deal with it later,' he thought, idly poking the golden egg with his wand while he stared at it, his glasses laying on the table. 'Looks like spells similar to those I've used to prevent some of my stuff from being damaged, but its all worked around... something I don't quite recognize. Maybe I should open it?'

Shrugging, and suiting actions to words, Harry pried the egg open while everyone at the table, which included Hermione, Neville, Ivan, and a few other of the fourth year Lions, only to be met by a wailing shriek. Everyone at the table, save Harry, clapped their hands over their ears, and started yelling at him to close it.

Harry however, only tilted his head to the side and looked at the egg for a half a minute before gently closing it. A number of students sitting at nearby tables were shooting him various looks, some of curiosity, while others were rather mean, and Hermione had finally

gathered herself back together enough to say, "Why didn't you close it more quickly?"

"Because I thought it was familiar sounding."

Neville got a confused look on his face and asked, "Doesn't all shrieking sound the same?"

"If it was only shrieking, you'd be right, but it isn't. I have good news, bad news, and something I am going to probably need to get my hands on."

Harry then shut up and went back to eating. His friends stared at him for a few minutes, wondering when he was going to pick the conversation back up. Finally Ivan said, realizing that Harry was trying to be dramatic, "Well what's the bad news?"

"I don't happen to speak or understand the language that is being spoken by the recording in the egg."

Hermione rolled her eyes at Harry's bad attempt at theatrics and asked, "And the good?"

"Aside from troll, it is the easiest language in the world to translate."

Neville lifted an eyebrow and then said, "Well what is it you are going to need to get?"

"Gillyweed."

Fleur had finally gotten tired of wondering where the hell Harry had been wandering off to whenever he wasn't in class, in the library, or in Gryffindor Tower (which she couldn't access). She had asked one of Harry's close friends, the girl named Hermione, if he spent the majority of his time in the Tower, and she had been fairly evasive, but she did let slip that he may have been getting up to other things in remote parts of the castle.

So, on the weekend a week after the first task, Fleur Delacour was following the Boy-Who-Lived to an upper floor of the North Wing. She wasn't entirely sure why the hell she was so curious about what he was up to, though part of her whispered that she wanted to see him work out like he did in the basement (and what a basement it

was) of the Manor. Part of her argued that he was three years younger than her and that she really shouldn't be leering at him like that. The whisper argued back with two points, one that even if he was fourteen, he still looked damn good when he was sweaty, and two, given the generalized lifespans of humans and near-humans, three years meant absolutely nothing.

She was fairly certain that the voice was a part of her Veela nature, the part of her that was more magic than mundane, and was far more instinctual. She thought that it had recognized a good mate, and she also had to be honest with her self that he might make a good boyfriend.

She was also fairly certain that he knew she was following him. He'd never gotten surprised by anything magical during the summer, though there were a few pranks the Marauders had performed with either mechanical or chemical triggers that had gotten Harry. So she continued following him from a distance, though a consecutive set of doors, before she heard, close to he left, "Hey Fleur."

She smiled and turned toward him. Then again, no person had managed to sneak up on her for years. Being able to both see and feel auras was useful in so many ways.

Harry started up with some small talk as he led her to wherever it was that he was heading to, she took the time to once more scrutinize how his aura felt. It was such a jumbled tumult of traits, a quick quiet intelligence, a mountain stubborn strength, a slowly fading bone deep loneliness, a sharp wry wit, a smidgen of gentle kindness, a fiery hair trigger temper, something like emotional control or disassociation, and a few other things that were harder to describe.

As for how it appeared to her eyes, the outer colors of it, those speaking of his current emotional state, appeared muted, as though any emotion felt was done so distantly. The inner colors were a patchwork of the colors that were connected to the traits she had felt earlier.

She had barely been paying attention to the conversation until he asked, "So, was there any particular reason you were following me?"

"I was curious as to what part of the castle you disappeared to so often..."

"I need a place where I can practice where people aren't looking over my shoulder. The top floor of the North Wing is one of the most deserted parts of the castle."

"So what is it that you are going to be doing?"

"Spell avoidance, deflection, and shielding."

"I really, really hope that none of the tasks include formal duels. I have a feeling that you will be an absolute beast to fight."

They finally stopped walking, and were in a very circular room with a number of training dummies, trunks, and even a rack or two of melee weapons by the walls. There was a black line in the shape of a circle painted on the floor a yard and a half from the wall, and various other circles were inscribed on the floor every yard within the black circle, with a solid gold circle in the center.

Harry turned to Fleur and asked, "What are you going to watch?"

She simply grinned at him and leaned against the wall near the door.

Rolling his eyes, he said, "Just stay on that side of the black line," as he opened one of the trunks and pulled out six spheres that looked to be made out of some crystal, possibly quartz, the size of lemons. Holding three in each hand, he walked to the gold circle, muttering under his breath in pseudo-Latin. Ending with a sharp command, he let go of the spheres, and they hung in midair.

Kneeling down, he laid his palm flat on the circle, he started muttering again, this time in Gaelic. There was no obvious end to this, instead he just continued on until there was a crack and sizzle as the boundary barrier came up. As he stood, the six spheres had been floating about, and now they floated at various heights, anywhere from two to eight feet from Harry, surrounding him.

Taking a deep breath he said, "Begin," and immediately moved toward his left as the spheres started firing various colored lights at the Potter. The pace started slowly, the spells both being relatively inaccurate and the rate of fire slow, and after a minute or so of

simply staying on the move, he had to actively begin dodging, changing direction rapidly and sometimes even tumbling. It eventually sped up to the point that no matter what he did he was getting tagged by every third or so 'spell'.

When it reached the point that he was being hit by every other blast of the modified paintball spell, he drew his wand in his right hand and twitched his left hand, running a spell through his shield ring.

He'd discovered something quite interesting about his shield focus. Rather than having a singular core like a good majority of foci, it had multiple separate strands of twilight diamond as the core material. The thing about that particular gem core is that even in small amounts it could efficiently channel large amounts of magic, especially when paired with Oriculum, which it was.

Unlike his wand, which had a compound core that could only do as much at the same time as any other wand, even if it could (theoretically) handle ungodly amounts of power, his ring could handle quite a few separate spells at one time, if he only had the concentration to make it work. Well he wouldn't need to use that function of the ring yet, but he needed practice with it. Besides, running all the cores on a single shield spell often made for some rather spectacular results.

As he felt the Duelist's Shield settle around his left arm from the elbow down with a slight buzz against his skin, Harry started using both it and his wand to deflect the incoming spells. At this point the tempo of the incoming spellfire underwent a noticeable shift. Rather than a constant measured stream of magic, it now came in fits and bursts, forcing him to work on his reaction time... of course he still had a few other tricks up his sleeve.

Of course this exercise ended just the same as the other times he had done it.

With Harry nearly concussing himself by ramming into the barrier surrounding the practice area and then proceeding to fall onto his back as his head swam. The floor had also been torn up by whatever the hell it was that he did. The spheres stopped firing as soon as Harry was struck by thirty splats of paint in a row, which is what usually occurred as he lay on the floor, looking up at the fuzzy lights that the head trauma brought on.

Fleur was clutching her stomach, and trying to reign in her laughter. She knew she should be at least a little concerned about the fact that her friend had probably just hurt himself, but it was like watching that funny cartoon coyote run headlong into the tunnel he had painted on the cliff side. Of course, whatever transportation magic that Harry had used was where the similarities ended...

From the floor, Harry yelled out, "Dobby! One headache relief potion, if you please!", before levering himself into a sitting position.

The elf popped in and handed Harry a flask, which he quickly downed. The little being then asked, "Still being having problems with the Step of Ghosts, Master Harry sir?"

Completely forgetting about his company, Harry held his head in his hands and replied, "It's Ghost Step, Dobby, and I think the answer to your question would be self evident. I just don't have the room here to practice it..."

Fleur finally managed to gather herself together following her laughing fit, and walked over to Harry, asking, "Just what is this 'Ghost Step', and why did make you run headlong into the barrier you put up?"

"The Ghost Step is a bit of transportation magic I dug up from the Potter Library. The original source was supposedly an old scroll that came from a clan of magical ninja in Japan. It allows for rapid movement in a straight line, and will move through most minor obstacles, like weak to moderate curses or anything with less mass than a kilogram, with no effect, but upon encountering more solid things, like walls, trees... and barriers... Well you saw the result. The problem is I haven't gotten it to anything less than a hundred meters, and I need to be moving at a good pace to begin with... Though I will know I am doing it right when I stop tearing up the ground when I use it."

"And that... other type of movement you were doing before hand?"

He grinned cheekily, and said, "I can explain it for you, I just don't know if anyone else is capable of doing it..."

When Harry was having an early breakfast the next morning an owl landed next to him, and proffered the letter attached to its leg. Offering it some bacon with one hand while removing the letter with the other, he said, "Thanks Lucky, I don't think I'll have a reply anytime soon. You can rest up in the Owlery before heading back to Gringotts if you want to."

Tearing open the letter, pulling out one piece of paper that was all by its lonesome and a set of four or five stapled together, he read the missive from Griphook... He then read it again, a blank look crossing his face. He read it a third time while reaching into the envelope and taking out the one thing he missed, a Chocolate Frog Card.

He then stared down at the card for a good minute or two before he yelled out the first thing that came into his mind, "Bloody hell! There's a Chocolate Frog Card of me!"

He then sunk back into his dazed and confused state for five or so minutes.

After finally snapping out of his stupor, he gathered up everything and quickly made his way out of the Great Hall, muttering to himself, "Goddamn fame. I don't want a second Card... What to do, what to do..."

Harry stayed after following his Transfiguration class on Tuesday, he needed to talk to his Head of House about something.

"What is it that you want to speak to me about, Mr. Potter?"

"Is there any chance that I could get you to set up a comprehensive test for everything that would be cover in your class this year, Professor McGonagall?"

The Deputy Headmistress stared at Harry for a few moments before she replied, "I assume you are trying to scrape together more time to get prepared for the Tournament?"

"Yes, ma'am. I also plan on asking Professors Flitwick, Vector, Sinistra, Babbling, Lupin, Moody, and maybe Snape... I just have to figure how to put it so that it comes out as being best for him..."

The professor blinked owlishly a few times before asking, "Wouldn't that would leave you only taking Care of Magical Creatures and Herbology?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"And why have you waited until more than a week after the first task?"

"I was paranoid as hell about the news of the upcoming Tournament, and was half prepared already in the event that I was press ganged into it. And I was. But now I'd like a little more breathing room."

"Language, Mr. Potter! I am going to have to insist that you at least continue to take four classes, Mr. Potter."

He sighed and nodded, before saying, "Then never mind about the test I'm asking you for. I'll continue to take Charms and Transfiguration along with the other two."

Over the next few days, he begged and pleaded his way through setting up tests for himself, he even managed to get a list of a dozen potions Professor Snape wanted him to brew, though Harry did angle it by saying that the Professor wouldn't have to see Harry in the class room for the rest of the year if he allowed it.

He also took the time to enlarge one of the rooms near his time compression chamber... and layer a couple dozen cushioning charms on the walls of the aforementioned room. He was going to get the Ghost Step down even if he gave himself a gross of concussions doing it.

As time passed and the second task grew closer, the focus of Harry's work for the tournament shifted from the large scale combat he had been in the process of preparing, to movement and demolition, though that wasn't all he was working on. From the hint that Crouch dropped when saying when the event was, Harry was guessing that it was going to be some manner of obstacle course.

He was definitely leaning towards naming his bag the Duffel of Destruction.

He managed to get all of his tests taken by the fourteenth, and so had managed to massively cut down the time he spent in class. The professors wouldn't be telling him how well he did until the end of the year, but he had been excused from each class he had taken a test for... with the exception of potions, though Snape had excused from class after Harry had handed in the first half a dozen potions on the list he had been given.

There was also the fact that large section of the castle grounds on the south side had been hidden from view by massive canvas walls. You didn't need three chances to guess where the next task was going to take place. And they were making massive glass walls in the Quidditch Stadium... That confused Harry for a little while, until he thought that they were possibly making the magical version of a jumbotron.

The morning of October the twenty-second, Harry threaded his way through the Great Hall to the table his friends were sitting at. He was weaving his way through the hustle and bustle with a graceful ease, even though people were staring at him.

Though he was probably unaware of the staring because he had a thick black length of cloth wrapped around his eyes. It could have also been the reason why people were staring.

Dropping himself into a seat next to Fleur at the table his friends were sitting at, who had also been joined by Victor and a friend of his, along with Cedric and another 'Puff, he said, "Good morning everyone."

Everyone simply stared at Harry for a moment before Ivan gathered himself enough to ask, "Why in the seven hells are you wearing a blindfold Harry?"

Directing what would be his gaze (if his eyes weren't covered) at Ivan's face, he said, "Because I can," before he shifted the blindfold enough to uncover one eye, and he started pulling food to himself.

Once more he struck everyone silent, and he just grinned and started eating. Deciding to freak them out even more, he tapped a little more deeply into his magic, and looked up from his food. Everyone at the table paled slightly when his visible eye started glowing an electric green.

He just couldn't help himself. He started laughing.

Apparently they would all be running this task at the same time. He sighed to himself as he listened to Bagman once more take up announcing duties, again hamming it up. Taking a moment and 'looking' at the silver sphere that was floating near him, he studied the magics that were bound to it. He then threw up the horns gesture he had seen some heavy metal artists do on the telly.

Besides, it is always unnerving when someone who supposedly can't see stares directly into the 'camera'.

He heard Fleur sigh in the area to his left. He could 'feel' four boxes marked out on the ground, and he had taken one on the far right when facing the canvas wall. She then asked, "Do you have to be so... so... I have no clue how to phrase just what you are!"

Turning to look her dead in the face, he said, "What I am is showboating. The Chocolate Frog Card People want to do a Tri-Wizard Champions series for restarting of the Tournament, and since I really don't feel like posing for any pictures, I told them to send someone with a camera and a telephoto lens to the second task. I am going to donate the money I get to St. Mungo's... Though I'm keeping the card they send me."

"So you are going to make us other champions look as bad as possible just to get out of a photo shoot?"

He smirked as he concentrated on his hair, shortening it and then making the red streaks in it glow, "Hell yes. And how the hell does Bagman say so much without saying anything?"

"I don't know. There is something I haven't thought to ask yet, but why red streaks in your hair? I know that when the wandmaker cast that spell to force you into your base form, your hair was all black... House pride?"

"My mother was a redhead."

"Ahh."

"Now hush, the windbag is almost finished."

And as the aforementioned man was finally getting to the point, "... and so, today's task will be an obstacle course that will test how quick our champions feet are, and how quickly they think on them! And the task will begin in five... four... three... two..."

With a deafening bang, a sudden cut off of their ability to hear the commentary, the canvas wall shimmered out of existence, and behind it was revealed...

"Hey guys," Harry said, "That's a hundred foot tall rock wall, right?"

Cedric brought the palm of one hand to his forehead, Viktor glared at Harry, and Fleur told him to go do some very rude things in French. Harry just grinned at them and flicked out his left hand casting a wandless summoning charm. "Shouldn't you three get climbing?"

Fleur and Cedric joined Krum in glaring at the Boy-Who-Lived. "You three do know that glares don't really affect those who can't see them?"

Shaking her head, Fleur made her way to the wall, casting Feather-light charms on herself. Cedric and Krum shared a look, before the former started transfiguring a spiral staircase from the artificial cliff face while the latter started conjuring lots of ropes.

Harry grinned, and snatched the speeding bundle out of the air as it approached him. He'd made some alterations to his bag, now it was about a foot and a half long, four inches wide, and six inches deep, and there was a sword sheath that was attached to it, and the bag itself was a hell of a lot bigger on the inside. If the size of the sheath was any indication of the blade it held, it would only as long as a very large knife or an extremely short sword. He pulled his shield ring off of the cord he had tied it to and slipped it on his left hand.

Placing it against the area of the black robe/trench coat he was wearing so that the sheath was parallel to the ground, and so that the two components to a binary sticking charm met. He had decided to forgo armor in place of this piece of clothing, just because of a little something he had included when he was playing around with runic arrays and wind spells...

Nodding to himself, checking over a field of energy he had been building around himself since he had gotten a peek behind the canvas wall with his magical sense, he took a deep breath while running his fingers over the activation trigger for the 'special effect' array he had.

If only he could figure out how the hell to push or pull against the air and he would actually be able to fly instead of having to settle for its bastard stepson. One line of focus would maintain the magical field around his body so that he would end up hurting himself like he did when he first tried moving himself with his telekinetic magic, another would control his movement along the z-axis, ensuring he didn't drive himself into the ground, a third would control his actual movement along the xy plane, while one final thought process would control what direction he was facing.

He just grinned as he floated half a foot off the ground, the runic array making his clothes and hair look like they were caught in a high wind.

In the Quidditch stadium, the massive crowd was struck silent as Harry Potter achieved what looked like the dream of many wizards.

Broom-less flight.

Finally Professor Severus Snape broke the silence.

"Potter! Fifty points from Gryffindor for showing off!"

Harry vaguely thought he heard a greasy haired git yell something, but he shrugged, chalking it up to his imagination. He tilted his head up and 'looked' toward the top of the cliff. Rolling his head, he quickly shot upward until he was level with Fleur, she was managing the climb quite quickly, already a third of the way up, and still going strong.

"Hey Fleur."

She glared at him for a moment before she said, "I hate you."

"Hey, I injured myself a number of times learning how to do this, and even when there were no actual injuries there was still quite a bit of pain. Where other Metamorphs have a tendency to heal more

quickly than normal witches and wizards, I having something that may very well be regeneration, though I don't really feel like losing any body parts to test that theory."

"You are still one of my least liked people at this moment Harry."

He just smirked at her and said, "Well, I'll see you at the finish line. Give the other two what for for me."

As he shot off toward the top, she slipped into her native tongue and called him many unflattering names.

At the top of the wall was a space about twenty feet across and as wide as the wall itself was, before there was a gap about fifty feet wide, with four ropes spanning it each near where a champion would come up after the climb. He could tell that it was only a drop of about ten feet... He snorted. He could easily hold himself a good twenty five feet off the ground if there were no walls, trees, or other solid surfaces to anchor himself off of. He 'flew' off at a sedate pace, not even feeling rushed about the fact that he was supposedly racing against the three other champions.

At the far end of the gap was another space the same size of the first, before a sudden drop off. Pinging his senses he felt like it went down a hundred feet back to the ground ending in a ten foot deep pool of water that was charmed in some way. Probably so that anyone who falls isn't hurt too badly. The drop in the gap was glowing with cushioning charms, and there were a few officials at the start who will probably catch anyone who drops from the climb.

He sighed and started to lower himself from the top of this wall.

Fleur pulled herself to the top of the wall and didn't bother to stand up yet, laying on her back catching her breath. Even if he had explained to her just why he couldn't actually fly, she was still more than a little upset that he had this part of the task so damn easy.

Growling to herself, she got to her feet, and then looked back down at the starting area. Cedric's staircase was about halfway up the cliff face, and Krum had apparently just finished putting together a rope ladder that he would then have to find a way to secure to the top. She then stared at the ropes suspended across the gap. She rolled her eyes, cast a charm on herself that would drastically improve her

balance for a little bit, and then cast a second one on the rope that would give her a larger surface area to walk on.

She then started to carefully walk along what was now, more or less, a tight rope.

Reaching the bottom of the wall, Harry floated along toward whatever lay next along the course. He could sense bits of the outside wall of a building, but there were... gaps, where he couldn't sense anything. Which was as odd as hell. Even out it non-magical London there was still enough errant magic in the air that he could still feel it.

But here, under the millennium old wards and over a confluence of lay lines, nothing?

He muttered under his breath, "An anti-magic field..."

He stretched his senses out as he got closer, determining that it there were four spherical 'bubbles', each just barely large enough to contain the door into the building. Dropping back to the ground, he tried to get a judge for how thick the wall was, and move much of a load it bore.

He was not bringing his precious Duffel of Destruction through an anti-magic field. He moved to the left of where his door was, drew his wand for the first time in the task, and simply transfigured a section of the wall into a doorway of his own.

The French Ministry judge was banging his head against the table the panel was sat at in the stadium, repeating, {Stupid, stupid, stupid...}

Madam Maxime at least asked, "Why did he avoid the real door?"

The German Ministry judge said, "He'd navigating the course perfectly while blindfolded, he probably has some secondary means of being aware of his surroundings, maybe he sense the anti-magic fields around the doors, and didn't want to risk whatever was in that bag of his..."

Dumbledore had been thinking something along the same lines, and was silently happy to get a second opinion on the matter. Maybe the ability to sense magic was 'the power he knows not'?

Nah. Tom was probably was well aware of the ability, and more than likely coveted it.

Moving along to the first interior chamber, he was aware of the next door, which was actually a double door, which were a good foot thick, and made of some rather dense materials... He'd have an easier time trying to blast through the wall than the door... and he didn't want to pull the trick of transfiguring a door more than once...

It was just boring if he was going to do that, so he put his wand away.

But the hinges and the locking mechanism on the other hand...

He drew his sword from the sheath at his back. Hefting it for a moment, he looked it over with his senses. Everything seemed to be in proper order, even if this wasn't what he was what he wanted... yet. If he could ever get it to be what he wanted.

If he had been looking at it with his eyes, the blade would have resembled a Japanese katana, though the blade seemed to be made out of some kind of opaque crystal, and was much thinner than it should have been. The hilt guard was made out of something that was a metallic green and the design on it was simply seven lines that ran from the outer part to the inner ring while curving slightly. The wrap on the handle was forest green.

Smirking, he launched himself at the door, flooding power into the blade as he held it in a two handed grip. It lit up light a Christmas tree to his magical senses. To those watching it started glowing with a soft white light.

Harry felt it was pretty damn impressive when it came to cutting things, but he was having trouble making a blade comprised solely of energy.

He'd only seen the Star Wars trilogy once when Moony had arranged for three of them to see it (Sirius had been a fan of the first two movies, but had missed the third due to being a resident of

Azkaban). He was going to make himself a lightsaber even if it took him the better part of a century to accomplish the feat. He just really hoped he figured it out next week instead.

He slid the blade between the two doors, obliterating the locking mechanism, before sliding to the right and launching himself into the air, dragging the blade through the exposed hinges on that side. Taking his left hand from the blade as he pushed him to the other side of the door, he made a pulling gesture with his recently freed hand, yanking the door toward where he been moments before. As he brought himself back to the ground, he broke the remaining hinges anyway, and pushed the second door away from him. The two doors crashed into the ground one after another.

Viktor reached the top of his rope ladder just Cedric came out of the end of his staircase. Cedric was looking like needed to take a break after the rather large amount of transfiguration. They watched as Fleur gave them a little wave from where she stood on the platform opposite them, right before she jumped out of sight. Krum was already on the move, choosing to drop carefully into the pit, and running the length of it. Cedric pulled a knife from his boot, cut the rope that was within his 'lane' of the obstacle course, before doing the same.

As she dropped through the last 'pane' of the variant of the momentum arresting spell she had used, move at little more than the downward speed of a small hop, Fleur fell into the water. She knew she had forgotten something important! As she swam to the far edge, she looked at the four rather large and forbidding closed black doors, and the open normal sized simple brown one that stood off to the left of what would have been Harry's.

Remembering that they had not been told that they had to stay in their own 'lanes' she ran toward the open door, a vicious smirk on her face...

Facing down a third door, Harry decided to reach into his Duffel for the first time, having already re-sheathed his sword, focusing on the object he wanted to pull out of it.

Letting loose something that sounded dangerously close to an insane giggle, Harry hefted the two and a half foot long metal object that would not have looked out of place as a prop for Zeus, the god

of thunder. Yes, Harry Potter had made a large metal lightening bolt. Gripping it as one would a javelin, he tapped his fingers against a series of runes on it. After a moment it began to spark with electricity, the amount increasing until it looked like he was holding an actual bolt of lightening.

Of course it was all theatrics, and what he was really holding was simply a funny shaped javelin that gave off very realistic sparks. The reason for the giggle however was the fact that the head of the 'javelin' contained some very fun explosives.

He only had one spell in his arsenal that allowed to harness anything close to lightening, and the fact of the matter was that a) he was not outside and therefore couldn't do it, b) it hurt like a bitch to use in the first place, and he was never likely to use it in combat because c) it took too long to cast to be effective in a dire situation.

Tossing his weapon at the latest door, he flicked his left hand out to raise a shield moments after it left his hand. He didn't want to get hit by debris.

As Fleur ran toward the open door, she stumbled as she heard an explosion from ahead of her. The fact that Harry had cleared the way for her (however unintentionally) had moved him back to the top four or five of her list of 'friends and friend-like people'.

She really hoped that he didn't blow himself to bits. She ran through the door, and then turned around and canceled the transfiguration he had done. That should slow the rest of the competition down.

Harry watched as the dust settled, waiting for... His head jerked back to stare in the direction he came from. He was not going to throw away his win by taking a sedate pace when Fleur was gaining on him. He gestured his left hand forming a protective dome in front of him, and threw himself forward, going from a stand still to a speed that would make Olympic sprinters jealous in a split second.

As he moved, he dug deeper into his magic, his eyes starting to glow beneath the blindfold while he reached forward with his telekinetic magics and tore the next set of double doors from the wall in an application of sheer brute force. Moments before he passed the space they had formerly occupied, the doors were thrown forward at high speed towards the fifth, followed closely by a

high powered, wide area banisher from his wand to clear a path through the freshly created debris.

Still moving at a fast clip, he moved through the destruction and the four 'lanes' merged into one hallway ending in spiral staircase. Traversing this space at a speed which would be dangerous if not suicidal for anyone not capable of catching themselves from dangerous falls, he made his way to the top quickly and came out into something that closely resembled the parapet at the top of the Astronomy Tower.

He heard Bagman announce, "And Harry Potter finishes the course in first place!", before he was plunged back into silence. Shrugging, he put his feet back against the wall, then sat down, his back against one of the crenelations of the top of whatever tower this was. Who knew how long the other three were going to take...

So he reached into the bag and pulled out one of his Rubik's Cubes and started toying around with it.

Fleur ran through the path Harry had made through the doors, jumping over the doors he had cut from their fittings, blasted apart, through the hole where one used to be, and then through the destruction of the last door. She moved quickly to the stairs, and then hurried upward.

As the door opened, and before Bagman's announcement of second place, Harry asked without looking up from his puzzle, "Still angry at me, even after I left a trail for you that a concussed troll could follow?"

As she stepped onto the parapet, she glared at him while ignoring Bagman's shouting, before replying, "You did that on purpose?"

A cheeky grin was all the answer she got, so she gave a huff, and then Harry said, "They really need to start being more specific about the rules. I could have just made more doors, and reverted the transfigurations when I was done."

Rolling her eyes at the Boy-Who-Lived, she walked over to him and sat next to him, "So how long do you think that we'll end up waiting for?"

"Depends on whether or not Heckle and Jeckle figure out what you did..."

The task eventually ended, though Cedric and Krum both took the 'long way', Cedric coming in third and Viktor in a distant fourth. The scores followed shortly after, with Harry receiving a fifty-five, with all but one of the judges giving him tens, while Karkaroff gave him a five for 'being an insolent showoff'. Fleur received a forty-nine, getting nines and eights from all the judges save, again, Karkaroff, who also gave her a five, saying 'she should have run her own course'. Cedric was given five sevens and a five, having 'run the course in the way it was designed to be beaten with great efficiency'. And Viktor, having come in last by a large margin was given twenty-six points.

Harry was leading in the points category, fifteen points ahead of the person closest behind him, Fleur, who as in second with ninety-seven points. There was a slightly smaller gap between second and Cedric at third, who had seventy-nine points. There was only a difference of eight points between Cedric and Viktor, who was currently bring up the rear.

They were not told the date of the third task, save that it would be occurring sometime time next month, and that it consisted of two challenges. They would be required to 'face despair under the noonday sun' and 'confront their greatest fear under the dark of the moon'.

Harry slapped his forehead with an open palm at the details of the second challenge. It would be taking place within a few days of the Third of November, which was when the new moon was in the sky. They really need to make up their minds, first they say they won't tell when the next task is besides the month, and then they drop a massive hint that any student of astronomy could figure out!

A/N2: So I had what was a well and truly disturbing concept pass my mind; fem!Lord Voldemort (or rather Lady Voldemort). And it is so bizarre that I keep thinking about it. I think it was triggered by how many times I saw LV and TMR alongside Harry as the pairing for fics. And more than a few fem!Harry's for that pairing, but I almost never see the reverse.

I really enjoyed reading the responses to the three first chapters I put up. WMoT and By Sunlight, By Moonlight, By Starlight (I need a nickname for this one) are fairly close in the voting and the reviews have them being fairly even, and the reviews for Status Quo helped me figure out how to fix it. I think that when I get to the end of fourth year I'll start cycling through the two of them in addition to this story. Though I do plan to go through and more or less rewrite Status Quo, I'm going to head back to second year with that, and start writing out minor changes and additions to canon that would result, before going entirely AU at the battle of the DoM. I'll then use what I have written for the summer preceding sixth year (albeit with some changes due to the alterations of the battle). The tri-lights will also receive some changes before it gets moved to a final version of its first chapter (so much so that it may end up being a pair of prologues) which will mostly include scenes here and there from Harry growing up and being taught.

I also have a few other ideas that come from left field that I may or may not end up writing previews/first chapters/prologues for, I am sometimes rather buried under college work. There is one that I am have not encountered yet, though I have seen a story or two leaning towards it (at least the second statement). Light side!Bellatrix as James's wife and Harry's mother.

So does that make two rare, bizarre ideas brought forth in one Author's Note? Oh, and I've un-blinded the poll. As a bit of an aside, the use of Edo Tensei in the latest arc of Naruto is just freaking ridiculous. I think Kishimoto just couldn't be bothered to think of another way to unload a few shipping containers worth of bad ass and whoop ass.

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